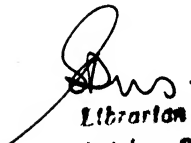


Beauchamp

1859


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NEAUCHAMPEL

THE ERROR.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "RICHELIEU," "DARNLEY," ETC.

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE

AND 18, 1

STREET.



BEAUCHAMP; OR, THE ERROR.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the reign of one of the Georges, when a gentleman of six or seven and twenty years of age rode along a pleasant country road somewhere in the west of England. It was eventide, when the sun, tired with his long race, slowly wends downwards to the place of his repose, looking back with a beaming glance of satisfaction on the bright things he has seen, and, like a benevolent heart, smiling at the blessings and the benefits he has left behind him.

It was a very fine evening of a very fine day of a very fine season, and that surely was enough to make any man happy who had good health, a guinea in his purse, and had not committed either murder or bigamy. The horseman seemed to feel the influence of the scene as much as could be expected of any man. When he was in a green bowery lane, with the wild plants trailing up and down the red banks, and he could neither look to the right nor to the left, he whistled snatches of a popular song: when he rose the side of the hill, and could gaze over the world around, he looked at the green fields, or the clear stream, or the woody coverts, with scarching and yet well-satisfied eyes, and murmured to himself, "Capital sport here, I dare say."

He seemed to be fond of variety, for sometimes he trotted his horse, sometimes made him canter, sometimes brought him into a walk, but it would appear that there was a certain portion of humanity mingling with the latent motives for these proceedings—inasmuch as the walk was either up or down a steep hill, the canter over a soft piece of turf wherever it could be found, and the trot where the road was tolerably level. Ever and anon, too, he patted the beast's neck, and talked to him quite friendly, and the horse would have answered him in the same tone, beyond

Doubt, if horses' throats and tongues had been formed by nature with the design of holding long conversations. Such not being the case, however, all the beast could do to express his satisfaction at his master's commendations, was to arch his neck and bend down his under lip till it touched his chest, and put his quivering ears backwards and forwards in a very significant manner. It was a handsome animal, of a bright bay colour, about fifteen hands and a half high, strongly built, yet showing a good deal of blood, and its coat was as soft and shining as satin. There was a good deal of red dust about its feet and legs, however, which showed that it had made a somewhat long journey ; but yet it displayed no signs of weariness : its head had no drowsy droop, like that of a county member on the back benches at three o'clock in the morning, after a long debate. Oh, no, there was muscle and courage for forty miles more, had it been necessary, and the noble beast would have done it right willingly. The horseman rode him well—that is to say, lightly ; and though he was tall, muscular, and powerful in frame, many a man of less weight would have wearied his horse much more. His hand was light and easy, his seat was light and easy, and his very look was light and easy. There was no black care sat behind that horseman, so that the burden was not burdensome, and the pair went on together with alacrity and good fellowship. The gentleman's dress was in very good taste, neither too smart nor too plain, well fitted for a journey, yet not unfitted for a drawing-room in the morning. This is enough upon that subject, and I will not say another word about it ; but as to his face, I must have a word or two more—it was gay and good-humoured, and though it might be called somewhat thoughtless in expression, yet somehow—I know not very well from what cause—when one examined it, one was convinced that the thoughtless look was more a matter of habit than of nature. He was dark in complexion, but with a healthy glow in his cheeks, and though certainly his face was not as perfect as that of the Apollo of Belvidere, yet few would have scrupled to pronounce him a good-looking man. There was also an easy, almost careless swinging, rapid air about him, which generally engages kindly feelings, if it cannot secure much respect : and one could not watch him come cantering over the lea, with his open, smiling face, without judging he would make an entertaining, good-humoured companion, with whom anybody might pass a few hours very pleasantly. Thus he rode along, blithe as a lark, till the sun went down in glory, shewing, at the distance of about a couple

of miles, the spire of a small church in a small town—or perhaps I had better call it a village, for I am not sure that it had grown up to townhood in those days.

The hint that I have given that he could see the spire of the church must have shown the reader, that at the moment of the sun's setting he was on the brow of a hill, for there are no plains in that part of the country, and it was well wooded also. Down from the spot at which he had then arrived, in a line very nearly direct towards the spire, descended the road, crossing first a small patch of common, perhaps not twenty acres in extent, and then entering between deep, shady banks, as it went down the hill, not only arched over with shrubs, but canopied by the branches of tall trees. There was quite sufficient light in the sky to show him the entrance of this green avenue, and he said to himself, as he looked on, "What a pretty approach to the village; how peaceful and quiet everything looks."

He was not aware that he had work to do in that quiet road, nor that it was to be of anything but a peaceful character: but so it is with us in life, we never know what is before us at the next step. We may scheme, and we may calculate; we may devise, and we may expect, but, after all, we are but blind men, led we know not whither by a dog, and the dog's name is, Fate.

When he saw that he was so near the village, he slackened his pace, and proceeded at a walk, wishing, like a wise and experienced equestrian, to bring his horse in cool. At the first trees of the road a deeper shade came into the twilight. About half a mile further it became quite dark under the boughs, whatever it might be in the open fields; the darkness did not make him quicken his pace, but the minute after he heard some sounds before him which did. It is not very easy to explain what these sounds were, or by what process it was, that, striking upon the tympanum of his ear, the two or three air-waves conveyed to his brain a notion that there were people in danger or distress at no great distance. There was a word spoken in a sudden and imperative tone, and that was the first sound he heard; and then there was a voice of remonstrance and entreaty, a woman's voice, and then something like a shriek, not loud and prolonged, but uttered as if the person from whose lips it came caught it as it was issuing forth and strove to stifle it in the birth. Some loud swearing and oaths were next heard, mingled with the noise of quick footfalls, as if some one were running fast towards the spot from the side of the village, and the next moment

the horseman perceived, at the first indistinctly, and then clearly, a number of objects on the road before him, the largest, if not the most important of which, was a carriage. At the head of the horses which had drawn it stood a man with something in his hand which might be a pistol. At the side of the vehicle were two more, with a saddled horse standing by, and they were apparently dragging out of the carriage a lady who seemed very unwilling to come forth ; but from the village side of the scene was hurrying up, as hard as he could run, another personage of very different appearance from the three other men. By this time he was within ten yards of them ; and our horseman, from his elevation on his beast's back, could see the head and shoulders of him who was approaching, and judged at once that he was a gentleman.

I have said that under the trees it was quite dark, and yet that he could see all this, but neither of these is a mistake, whatever the reader may think ; for just at that part of the highway where the carriage stood, it was crossed by another road, which let in all that remained of the western light, and there the whole scene was before his eyes, as a picture, even while he himself was in comparative darkness. Impulse is an excellent thing, and a great deal more frequently leads us right than reason, which, in cases of emergency, is a very unserviceable commodity. It is only necessary to have a clever impulse, and things go wonderfully well. The horseman stuck his spurs into his horse's sides : he had been going at a trot, since the first sounds struck his ear, but now it became a canter, and two or three springs brought him up to the carriage. He was making straight for the side, but the man who was at the horses' heads seemed to regard his coming as unpleasant, and, shouting to him in a thundering voice to keep back, he presented a pistol straight at him with a sharp, disagreeable, clicking sound, which, under various circumstances, is peculiarly ungrateful to the human ear, especially when the muzzle of the instrument is towards us, for there is no knowing what may come out of the mouth at the next minute. But the horseman was quick, active, and not accustomed to be daunted by a little thing like a pistol ; and therefore, holding his heavy riding-whip by the wrong end, though in this instance it proved the right one, he struck the personage opposite to him a thundering blow over the arm. That limb instantly dropped powerless by his side, and the pistol went off under the horse's feet, causing the animal to rear a little, but hurting no one. In an instant, the horse was turned and amongst the party

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by the carriage; but that party was by this time increased in number, though not fortified by unanimity, for the person who had been seen running up was by this time engaged in fierce struggle with one of the original possessors of the ground, while the other kept a tight grasp upon the lady who had just been dragged out of the carriage. With the two combatants our horseman thought it best not to meddle in the first instance, though he saw that the object of one of them was to get a pistol at the head of the other, who seemed neither unwilling nor unable to prevent him from accomplishing that object; but they were grappling so closely, that it was difficult to strike one without hitting the other, especially in the twilight; and therefore, before he interfered in their concerns, he bestowed another blow, with the full sweep of his arm, upon the head of the man who was holding the lady, and who seemed to take so deep an interest in what was going on between the other two, as not to perceive that any one was coming up behind him. The worthy recipient instantly staggered back, and would have fallen, had not the wheel of the carriage stopped him; but then turning fiercely round, he stretched out his arm, and a flash and report followed, while a ball whistled past the horseman's cheek, went through his hair, and grazed his hat.

"Missed, on my life," cried the horseman; "take that for your pains, you clumsy hound." And he again struck him, though on this occasion the person's head was defended by his arm.

"H—l and d——n," cried the other, seizing his horse's bridle, and trying to force him back upon his haunches, but another blow, which made him stagger again, showed him that the combat was not likely to end in his favour, and darting past, he exclaimed, "Run, Wolf, run! The captain is off!" And before our friend on the bay horse could strike another blow at him, he had sprung upon the back of the beast that stood near, and without waiting to put his feet into the stirrups, galloped away as hard as he could go. In regard to the other two who were wrestling, as we have said, in deadly strife, the game they were playing had just reached a critical point, for the gentleman who had come up had contrived to get hold of the barrel of the pistol, and at the very instant the other galloped away, the respectable person he called Wolf received a straightforward blow in the face, which made him stagger back, leaving his weapon in the hand of his opponent. Finding that his only advantage was gone, he instantly darted round

the back of the carriage to make his escape up the other road.

"Jump down and stop him, post-boy," cried the horseman, pursuing him at the same time without a moment's pause; but the post-boy's legs, though cased in leather, seemed to be made of wood, if one might judge by the stiff slowness with which they moved; and before he had got his feet to the ground, and his whip deliberately laid over the horse's back, the fugitive, finding that the horseman had cut him off from the road, caught the stem of a young ash, swung himself up to the top of the bank, and disappeared amongst the trees.

"Hark! there is a carriage coming," said the horseman, addressing the stranger, who had followed him as fast as two legs could follow four. They both paused for an instant and listened, but to their surprise the sound of rolling wheels, which they distinctly heard, diminished instead of increasing, and it became evident that some vehicle was driving away from a spot at no great distance.

"That's droll," said the horseman, dismounting; "but we had better see after the ladies, for I dare say they are frightened."

"No doubt they are," replied the other, in a mild and musical voice, leading the way round the carriage again. "Do you know who they are?"

"Not I," answered the horseman—"don't you?"

"No, I am a stranger here," answered the other, approaching the side of the carriage, to which the lady who had been dragged out had now returned.

She was seated with her hands over her eyes, as if either crying with agitation or in deep thought; but the moment the gentleman who had come up on foot addressed her, expressing a hope that she had not been much alarmed, she replied, "Oh, yes, I could not help it; but my mother has fainted. We must go back, I fear."

"It is not far, I think, to the village, madam," said our friend the horseman, "and we will easily bring the lady to herself again; but it is a pity she fainted, too. These things will happen; and if they had not got your money there is no great harm done."

"I am better, Mary," said a voice from the other side of the carriage, faint and low, yet sweet and harmonious. "Are they gone—are you quite sure they are gone?"

"Oh, dear, yes, madam," replied the horseman, while the lady next him laid her hand tenderly upon her mother's.

"One of the worthies scampered off on horseback after he

had fired at me, and the other was too quick for us all, thanks to your stiff-jointed driver. What became of the other fellow I don't know."

"You are not hurt, sir, I hope," said the younger of the two ladies, gazing timidly at him through the half light.

"Not in the least," he replied. "The man missed me, though it wasn't a bad shot after all, for I felt it go through my hair,—but an inch one side or the other makes a wonderful difference—and now, ladies, what will you do?"

A murmured consultation took place between the two tenants of the carriage, while a whispered conference was held by the gentlemen who came to their assistance. It is wonderful how often in this world several parties of the good folks of which it is composed are all thinking—ay, and even talking—of the same thing, without any one group knowing what the other is about.

"I'm doubtful of that post-boy," said the gentleman on foot to the gentleman who had been on horseback.

"Ay, and so am I," replied the other. "He's in league with them, depend upon it. All post-boys are so. Their conscience is like the inn leather breeches, wide enough to fit anything. I wonder how far these two ladies are going?"

"I cannot tell," answered the other, "but it will be hardly safe for them to go alone."

"Can I speak to you, sir, for a moment," said the voice of the younger lady from the carriage, and the horseman, advancing a step, leaned against the doorway, and put his head partly in, bending down his ear, as if he were perfectly certain that he was going to hear a secret.

"My mother thinks, and so do I," continued the young lady, "that the man who drives us must have been bribed by those people who attacked us, for he drove very slowly as soon as he came near this spot. He stopped, too, the moment they called to him."

"Perhaps not bribed, my dear madam," replied the gentleman; "all these post-boys, as they are called, favour our honest highwaymen, either in hopes of a part of the booty, or merely out of fellow feeling. They are every one of them amateurs, and some of them connoisseurs, of the arts of the road. You must have some protection, that's certain, and I think it would be better for you to turn back and get some people from the village to accompany the carriage."

"I'm afraid that can hardly be," said the elder lady. "We are already very late, and this has delayed us. My brother may be dead ere we arrive, for I'm going on a sad

errand, sir, he having been suddenly seized with gout in the stomach, and sent to call me to him in his last moment. However, it is not very far, and I trust that nothing more will happen."

"No, no, madam; you must not go without protection," replied the gentleman, in a good-humoured tone. "I will ride with you and see you safe—how far is it?"

"About five miles, I am afraid," answered the lady.

"Oh, that's nothing—that's nothing," cried their companion. "It will but make me an hour later at supper." And, turning to the other gentleman, he continued, "I wish, sir, if you pass the inn called the White Hart——"

"I lodge there myself," returned the stranger.

"Then pray tell the people to have a chicken ready in an hour," continued the horseman. "It will be resting while I am riding, so that will be one way of killing time, and not losing patience."

Thus saying, with a gay laugh he sprang upon his horse's back, and addressing the post-boy, exclaimed, while the other gentleman shut the door, and bade the ladies adieu, "Now, boy, into the saddle; and remember, if these ladies are interrupted again, the first head that is broken shall be yours."

The man made no reply, but got up with more alacrity than he had got down, and was soon trotting along the road at a rapid rate.

The horseman kept close to the carriage all the way, and after a ride of about five-and-thirty minutes, through pleasant lanes and fields, they came to what seemed the gates of a park, but the porter's lodge was dim and unlighted, and the post-boy gave the horseman a significant hint that he had better get down and open the gates, as there was nobody there to do it for him. The gentleman, however, managed the feat dexterously without dismounting, and the carriage rolled through and entered a long avenue of magnificent chesnuts. Between the boughs of the trees, every here and there, were to be seen glimpses of soft green slopes studded with wild hawthorns, and masses of dark wood beyond, and at the end of about three-quarters of a mile more, appeared a fine old stone house, with a somewhat flat but imposing face, like that of an old country gentleman, with a great idea of his own importance.

As the horseman looked up to the house, however, which was raised upon a little terrace, and approached by a gentle rise, he could not help thinking, "That does not look very much like the dwelling of a man dying of gout

in the stomach ; it looks more like that of one getting up a good fit ; for three windows on the ground floor, having very much of a dining-room aspect about them, were thrown up to admit the air, and in addition to a blaze of light, there came forth the sounds of merry laughter, and several persons talking.

The post-boy drove up to the great door, however, and the horseman, springing to the ground, rang the bell, after which, returning to the side of the carriage, he leaned against it, saying,

"I trust your relation is better, madam, for the house does not seem to be one of mourning."

The lady did not reply directly to his words, but she said, "I hope if you remain in this part of the country, sir, you will give me an opportunity of thanking you, either here, or at my own house, called Hinton, for the great service you have rendered me. The people of the inn will direct you, for it is only ten miles on the other side of Tarningham."

"I shall certainly have the honour of waiting on you to inquire how you do," replied the horseman ; and then adding, "these people do not seem inclined to come," he returned to the bell, and rang it vigorously.

The next moment the door was opened, and a capacious butler appeared, and the stranger, without more ado, assisted the ladies to alight, remarking as he did so, that the younger of the two was an exceedingly pretty girl, some nineteen or twenty years of age.

"How is my brother now?" demanded the elder lady, who wore a widow's dress.

"Quite well, ma'am, thank you," answered the butler, in the most commonplace tone possible ; and before she had time to make any more inquiries, the stranger who had come to her rescue wished her and her daughter good night, and mounting his horse, rode down the avenue again.

CHAPTER II.

THE White Hart of Tarningham was a neat little country inn, such as was commonly found in most of the small towns of England at the period of my tale. They are rapidly being brushed off the face of the earth by the great broom of the steam-engine, and very soon the "pleasures of an inn" will be no longer known but by the records of history, while men run through the world at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, finding nothing on their way but

stations and "hotels." I hate the very name, hotel. It is un-English, uncomfortable, unsatisfactory—a combination, I suppose, of host and hell—the recipient of perturbed spirits, and their tormentor. But the word *inn*, how comfortable it is in all its significations! We have only retained the double *n* in it, that we may "wear our rue with a difference," and whether we think of being *in* place, or *in* power, or *in* the house during a storm, or *in* the hearts of those we love, how pleasant is the feeling it produces! It has a home-like and British sound, and I do with all my heart wish that my fellow-countrymen would neither change their words nor their manners for worse things of foreign parentage. An inn, in the days I speak of, was a place famous for white linen, broiled ham, and fresh eggs. I cannot say that the beefsteaks were always tender, or the veal cutlets always done to a turn, or the beds always the softest in the world, but then think of the white dimity curtains, and the casements that rattled just enough to let you know that it was blowing hard without, and the rosy, apple-faced chambermaid, and the host himself, round as his own butts—ay, and as full of beer. An innkeeper of those days would have been ashamed to show himself under nineteen stone. He was a part of his own sign, the recommendation of his own ale. His very paunch seemed to say, "Look what it has done for me." It entered into his fat, it flowed through his veins, it puffed out his cheeks, it ran out at his eyes, and malt and hops was heard in every accent of his tongue. You had no lean, wizen-faced, black-silk-stockinged innkeepers in those days, and the very aspiring waiters imitated their landlord, and hourly grew fat under the eye, that they might be in a fit condition to marry the widow and take up the business when the "poor dear gentleman" was swallowed up in beer.

Such an inn was the White Hart at Tarningham, and such a host was the landlord; but he was a wise man, and loved not to look upon his successors, for which cause, as well as on account of the trade not being very brisk in that quarter, he maintained no regular waiter; he had a tapster; it is true, but the cloth in the neat little parlour on the left hand was laid by a white-capped, black-eyed, blooming maid-servant, and the landlord himself prepared to carry in the first dish, and then leave his expected guest to the tendance of the same fair damsel.

The room was already occupied by one gentleman, the same who, in taking his evening walk, had joined with our friend the horseman in the rescue of the two ladies, and to say truth, it was owing to his courtesy that the cloth was

said there at all, for he had prior possession, and on communicating to the landlord the fact that a guest would soon arrive who proposed to sup upon roast chicken, the worthy host had exclaimed in a voice of consternation, "Good gracious me, what shall I do? I must turn those fellows out of the tap-room and serve it there, for there is old Mrs. Grover, the lawyer's widow, in the other parlour, and ne'er a sitting-room else in the house!"

"You can make use of this, landlord," replied the stranger; "this gentleman seems a very good-humoured person, and I do not think will be inclined to find fault, although he may not have a whole sitting room to himself."

"I'd bet a quart," cried the landlord, as if a sudden thought struck him, "I'd bet a quart that it's the gentleman whose portmanteaus and gun-cases and a whole bundle of fishing-rods came down this morning. I'll run and see what's the name."

Whatever he felt, the gentleman already in possession expressed no curiosity; but in two minutes the host rolled back again—for to run, as he threatened, was impossible—and informed his guest that the things were addressed to "Edward Hayward, Esq., to be left at the White Hart, Tarningham."

"Very well," said the guest; and without more ado, he took up a book which had been lying on the mantel-piece since the morning, and placing his feet upon another chair, began to read. The landlord bustled about the room, and put the things in order. One of his fat sides knocked his guest's chair, and he begged pardon, but the gentleman read on. He then took up the hat, which had been knocked off in the struggle near the chaise, wiped off the red sand which it had gathered, and exclaimed, "Lord bless me, sir! your hat's all beaten about;" but his companion merely gave a nod, and read on.

At length, when the table was laid, and mustard, pepper, salt, vinegar, and bread had been brought in severally, when the maid had re-arranged what the landlord had arranged before, smoothed what he had smoothed, and brushed what he had brushed, a horse's feet, trotting past the window, were heard, and the minute after a voice exclaimed at the door of the inn, "Here, ostler, take my horse; loose the girths, but don't take off the saddle yet; sponge his mouth, and walk him up and down for five minutes. Has his clothing come?"

"Oh, dear, yes, sir—come this morning," answered the landlord. "This way, sir, if you please."

not let me know before, for positively there is not a whole sitting-room in the house."

"Well, then, I will do with half of one," answered the stranger. "Why, my friend, if you grow any more you must have the doors widened. You are the man for defending a pass; for, upon my life, in default of harder materials, you would block up Thermopylae. Ale, ale, ale, it's all ale, landlord, and if you don't mind, it will set you ailing. Have my fishing-rods come down?—all safe I hope?" and by the time he had run through these questions and observations, he was in the doorway of the little parlour on the left hand. He stared for a minute at the previous tenant of the room, who rose to receive him with a smile, and whose face he did not seem to have observed very accurately in the semi-darkness of the road. But the height and general appearance of the stranger soon showed him that they had met before, and with an easy, dashing air, he went up and shook him by the hand.

"A strange means of making acquaintance, my dear sir," he said, "but I'm very happy to see you again, and safe and well, too, for I thought at one time you were like to get knocked on the head; and I scarcely dared to interfere, lest I should do it for you myself in trying to hit the other fellow. I hope you did not get any wounds or bruises in the affray?"

"Oh, no!" replied the stranger; "I was nearly strangled, that is certain, and shall not easily forget the grasp of that man's fingers on my throat; but in regard to this way of making an acquaintance, no two men, I should think, could desire a better than to be both engaged, even accidentally, in rescuing two ladies from wrong."

"Quite chivalrous!" exclaimed the horseman, laughing; "but two Don Quixotes would never do in the world; so I'll acknowledge, at once, that I've not the least spark of chivalry in my nature. If I see a strong thing hurting a weak thing, I knock the strong thing down, of course. I can't bear to see a big dog worry a little one, and don't much like to see a terrier catch a rat. But it's all impulse, my dear sir—all impulse. Thank Heaven, I am totally destitute of any sort of enthusiasm! I like everything in the world well enough, but don't wish to like anything too much, except, indeed, a particularly good bottle of claret—there, there, I am afraid I am weak. As to helping two ladies, it is always a very pleasant thing, especially if one of them be a particularly pretty girl, as is the case in this instance, I can tell you; but we really should do some-

thing to have these fellows caught; for they might have had the decency to wait till it was quite dark, and not begin their lawless avocations before the sun has been down half an hour."

"I went immediately to a magistrate," answered the stranger; "but, as in very many country places, I did not find the ornament of the bench very highly enlightened. Because I was not the party actually attacked, he demurred to taking any steps whatever, and though I shook his resolution on that point, and he seemed inclined to accede to my demand, yet as soon as he found that I could not even give him the names of the two ladies, he went all the way back again, and would not even take my deposition. Perhaps, after supper, we had better go to him together, for I dare say you can supply my deficiency by this time, and tell him the name of your pretty lady and her mother."

"No; 'pon my life, I can't," rejoined his companion; "I quite forgot to ask—a very beautiful girl, though, and I wonder I didn't inquire, for I always like to tickle pretty faces. What is the name of your Midas? we'll soon bring him to reason, I doubt not. A country magistrate not take a deposition against a highwayman! By Heaven, he will make the people think he goes shares in the booty!"

"A highwayman!" exclaimed the landlord, who had been going in and out, listening to all that was said, whether he had a bread-basket, or boiled potatoes, or a jug of fresh-drawn beer in his hand. "Why, lord, Mr. Beauchamp, you never told me!"

"No, my good friend," answered the other, "I did not, because to spread such a tale through an inn, is the very best way I know of insuring the highwayman's escape."

"Well, I dare say, my good round friend," exclaimed the horseman, whom we shall hereafter call Hayward, or, as almost all who knew him had it, Ned Hayward, "I dare say you can help us to the names of these two ladies. Who was it one of your post-boys drove to-night, out there to the westward, to a house in a park?"

"What, to Sir John Slingsby's?" exclaimed the host; but before he could proceed to answer the more immediate question, Ned Hayward gave himself a knock on the forehead, exclaiming,—

"Sir John Slingsby's! Why, that's the very house I'm going to, and I never thought to ask the name—what a fool I am! Well might they call me, when I was in the 40th, Thoughtless Ned Hayward. But come, 'mine host of the Garter'——"

"Of the White Hart, your honour," replied the landlord, with as low a bow as his stomach would permit.

"Ay, of the White Hart be it then," said Ned Hayward; "let us hear, who are these beautiful ladies whom your post-boy drove so slowly, and stopped with so soon, at the bidding of three gentlemen of the road, with pistols in their hands?"

"Lord-a-mercy!" cried the host, "and was it Mrs. Clifford and her daughter that they stopped? Well, I shouldn't wonder—but mum's the word—it's no affair of mine, and the least said is soonest mended."

The host's countenance had assumed a mysterious look. His whole aspect had an air of secrecy. He laid his finger upon the side of his nose, as men do for a practical exemplification of the process which is taking place in their mind when they are putting "that and that" together. He half closed one eye also, as if to give an indication to the beholders that, whatever might be the mental light in his own brain, it should not escape for the illumination of those without. There is a perversity in human nature which makes all men—saving the exceptions that prove the general rule—anxious to discover anything that is hidden, and consequently both Mr. Hayward and Mr. Beauchamp attacked the worthy landlord, totis viribus, and attempted to wrench from him his secret. He held it fast, however, with both hands, exclaiming,—

"No, no, gentlemen, I'll not say a word—it's no business of mine—I've nothing to do with it—it's all guess work, and a man who beers and horses all the neighbourhood, must keep a good tongue in his head. But one thing I will say, just to give you two gentlemen a hint, that perhaps you had better not meddle in this matter, or you may make a mess of it. Sally, is not that chicken ready?" And he called from the door of the room to the bar.

"I certainly shall meddle with it, my good friend," said Ned Hayward, in a determined tone, "and that very soon. I'm not the least afraid of making a mess, as you call it, certain that none of it will fall upon myself. So, as soon as we have got supper, which seems a very long time coming, we will set off, Mr. Beauchamp, if you please, for this good magistrate's, and try——"

He was interrupted in the midst of his speech, though it had by this time nearly come to a conclusion, by a voice in the passage, exclaiming, "Groomer! Mr. Groomer!" and the host instantly vociferated, "Coming, sir! coming!" and rushed out of the room.

The voice was heard to demand, as soon as the landlord

appeared blocking up the way, "Have you a person by the name of Beauchamp here?"

"Yes, your worship," replied the host; and after a few more words, in a lower tone, the door of the room was thrown open, and Mr. Wittingham was announced, just as Mr. Beauchamp was observing to his new-found friend, Ned Hayward, that the voice was very like that of the worthy magistrate to whom he had applied.

Mr. Wittingham was a tall and very respectable-looking gentleman, somewhat past the middle age, and verging towards that decline of life which is marked by protuberance of the stomach, and thinness of the legs. But, nevertheless, Mr. Wittingham carried it off very well, for his height diminished the appearance of that which is usually called a corporation, and his legs were skilfully concealed in his top-boots. He was exceedingly neat in his apparel, tolerably rosy in the gills, and having a certain dogmatical peremptory expression, especially about the thick eyebrows and hook nose, which he found wonderfully efficacious in the decision of cases at petty sessions.

The moment he entered the room, he fixed his eyes somewhat sternly upon Mr. Beauchamp (whom we have forgotten to describe as a very gentlemanlike—even distinguished—looking person of about thirty years of age), and addressing him in a rough and rather uncivil tone, said, "Your name, I think you told me, is Beauchamp, sir, and you came to lay an information before me against certain persons for stopping a chaise upon the king's highway."

"I am, as you say, sir," called Beauchamp, "replied the other gentleman, "and I waited upon you, as the nearest magistrate, to give information of a crime which had been committed in your neighbourhood, which you refused to receive. Do me the honour of taking a seat."

"And pray, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask, who and what are you?" inquired the magistrate, suffering himself to drop heavily into a chair.

"I should conceive that had very little to do with the matter," interposed Ned Hayward, before Mr. Beauchamp could answer. "The simple question is, whether an attempt at highway robbery, or perhaps a worse offence, has or has not been made this night upon Mrs. and Miss Clifford, as they were going over to my friend Sir John Slingsby's; and allow me to say that any magistrate who refuses to take a deposition on such a subject, and to employ the best means at his command to apprehend the offenders, grossly neglects his duty." •

"The host brought in the roast fowl, and stared at the dashing tone of Ned Hayward's speech towards one of the magnates of the neighbourhood. Some words in the commencement of that speech had caused Mr. Wittingham's countenance to fall, but the attack upon himself in the conclusion, roused him to indignant resistance, so that his reply was an angry demand of "Who the devil are you, sir?"

"I am the devil of nobody, Mr. Wittington," answered Ned Hayward. "I am my own devil, if anybody's, and my name is Edward Hayward, commonly called Captain Hayward, late of the 40th regiment, and now unattached. But as my supper is ready, I will beg leave to eat my chicken hot. Beauchamp, won't you join? Mr. Wittington, shall I give you a wing? Odd name, Wittington. Descendant of the renowned Lord Mayor of London, I presume?"

"No, sir—no," answered the magistrate, while Beauchamp could scarcely refrain from laughing. "What I want to know is, what you have to do with this affair?"

"Everything in the world," answered Ned Hayward, carving the chicken, "as I and my friend Beauchamp here had equal shares in saving the ladies from the clutches of these vagabonds. He came back here to give information, while I rode on with the ladies to protect them. Bring me a bottle of your best sherry, landlord. Now, I'll tell you what, Mr. Wittington—Haven't you got any ham that you could broil?—I hate chicken without ham, it's as insipid as a country magistrate. I'll tell you what, Mr. Wittington, this matter shall be investigated to the bottom, whether you like it or not; and I have taken care to leave such marks upon two of the vagabonds, that they'll be easily known for the next month to come. One of them is very like you, by the way, but younger. I hit him just over the eye, and down about the nose, so that I'll answer for it I have lettered him in black and blue as well as any sheep in your fields; and we'll catch him before we've done, though we must insist upon having the assistance of the justices."

"I think, sir, you intend to insult me," said the magistrate, rising with a very angry air, and a blank and embarrassed countenance.

"Not a whit, my dear sir," answered Ned Hayward. "Pray sit down and take a glass of wine."

"I won't, sir," exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, "and I shall leave the room. If you have anything to say to me, it must come before me in a formal manner, and at a proper

hour. To-morrow I shall be at the justice room till eleven, and I hope you will then be prepared to treat the bench with respect."

"The most profound, sir," said Ned Hayward, rising and bowing till his face almost touched the table before him, and then, as Mr. Wittingham walked away with an indignant toss of the head, and closed the door behind him, our gay friend turned to his companion, saying, "There's something under this, Beauchamp. We must find out what it is."

CHAPTER III.

I WILL have nothing to do with antecedents. The reader must find them out if he can, as the story must explain what precedes the story.

Nevertheless, it is always well worth while, in order to avoid any long journeys back, to keep every part of the story going at once, and manfully to resist both our own inclination and the reader's to follow any particular character, or class of characters, or series of events. Rather let us, going from scene to scene, and person to person, as often as it may be necessary, bring them up from the rear. It is likewise well worth while to pursue the career of such new character as may be introduced, till those who are newly made acquainted with him have discovered a sufficient portion of his peculiarities.

I shall therefore beg leave to follow Mr. Wittingham on his way homeward; but first I will ask the reader to remark him as he pauses for a moment at the inn-door, with worthy Mr. Groomer a step behind. See how the excellent magistrate rubs the little vacant spot between the ear and the wig with the fore-finger of the right hand, as if he were a man amazingly puzzled, and then turns his head over his shoulder to inquire of the landlord if he knows who the two guests are, without obtaining any further information than that one of them had been for some weeks in the house—which Mr. Wittingham well knew before, he having the organ of Observation strongly developed—and that the other had just arrived, a fact which was also within the worthy magistrate's previous cognizance.

"Very like me," he said—"very like me? Hang the fellow! Very like me! Why, what the devil! Very like me! I shall have roystering Sir John upon my back—'pon my life, I do not know what to do. Perhaps it would

be better to be civil to these two young fellows, and ask them to dinner; though I do not half like that Beauchamp—I always thought there was something suspicious about him, with his grave look, and his long solitary walks, nobody knowing him, and he knowing nobody. Yet this Captain Hayward seems a great friend of his, and he is a friend of Sir John's—so he must be somebody—I wonder who the devil he is? Beauchamp?—Beauchamp? I shouldn't wonder if he were some man rusticated from Oxford. I'll write and ask Henry. He can most likely tell."

The distance which Mr. Wittingham had to go was by no means great, for the little town contained only three streets—one long one, and two others leading out of it. In one of the latter, or rather at the end of one of the latter—for it verged upon the open country beyond the town—was a large house, his own particular dwelling, built upon the rise of the hill, with large gardens and pleasure-grounds surrounding it, a new, well-constructed, neatly-pointed brick wall, two green gates, and sundry conservatories. It had altogether an air of freshness and comfort about it, which was certainly pleasant to look upon, but it had nothing venerable. It spoke of fortunes lately made, and riches fully enjoyed, because they had not always been possessed. It was too neat to be picturesque—too smart to be in good taste. It was a bit of Clapham or Tooting transported a hundred or two of miles into the country—very suburban indeed!

And yet it is possible that Mr. Wittingham had never seen Clapham in his life, or Tooting either; for he had been born in the town where he now lived; had accumulated wealth as a merchant on a small scale, in a sea-port town about fifty miles distant; had improved considerably, by perseverance, a very limited stock of abilities; and, having done all this in a short time, had returned, at the age of fifty, to enact the country gentleman in his native place. With the ordinary ambition of low minds, however, he wished much that his origin and the means of his rise should be forgotten by those who knew them, concealed from those who did not; and therefore he dressed like a country gentleman, spoke like a country gentleman, hunted with the fox-hounds, and added "J. P." to his "Esquire."

Nevertheless, do what he would, there was something of his former calling which still remained about him. It is a dirty world this we live in, and everything has its stain. A door is never painted five minutes, but some indelible finger-mark is printed on it; a table is never

polished half an hour, but some drop of water falls and spots it. Give either precisely the same colour again, if you can! Each trade, each profession, from the shop-keeper to the prime minister, marks its man more or less for life, and I am not quite sure that the stamp of one is much fouler than that of another. There is great vulgarity in all pride, and most of all in official pride, and the difference between that vulgarity and the vulgarity of inferior education is not in favour of the former; for it affects the mind, while the other principally affects the manner.

Something of the merchant—the small merchant—still hung about Mr. Wittingham. It was not alone that he kept all his books by double entry, and even in his magisterial capacity, when dealing with rogues and vagabonds, had a sort of debtor and creditor account with them, very curious in its items; neither was it altogether that he had a vast idea of the importance of wealth, and looked upon a good banker's book, with heavy balance in favour, as the chief of the cardinal virtues; but there were various peculiarities of manner and small traits of character, which displayed the habit of mind to inquiring eyes very remarkably. His figures of speech, whenever he forgot himself for a moment, were all of the counting-house: when on the bench he did not know what to do with his legs for want of a high stool; but the trait with which we have most to do was a certain propensity to inquire into the solidity and monetary respectability of all men, whether they came into relationship with himself or not. He looked upon them all as "Firms," with whom at some time he might have to transact business; and I much doubt whether he did not mentally put "and Co." to the name of every one of his acquaintances. Now Beauchamp and Co. puzzled him; he doubted that the house was firm; he could make nothing out of their affairs; he had not, since Mr. Beauchamp first appeared in the place, been able even to get a glimpse of their transactions; and though it was but a short distance, as I have said, from the inn to his own dwelling, before he had reached the latter, he had asked himself at least twenty times, "Who and what Mr. Beauchamp could be?"

"I should like to look at his ledger," said Mr. Wittingham to himself at length, as he opened his gate and went in; but there was a book open for Mr. Wittingham in his own house, which was not likely to show a very favourable account.

Although the door of Mr. Wittingham's house, which was a glass door, stood confidently unlocked as long as the

sun was above the horizon, yet Mr. Wittingham had always a pass key in his pocket, and when the first marble step leading from the gravel walk up to the entrance was found, the worthy magistrate's hand was always applied to an aperture in his upper garment just upon the haunch, from which the key was sure to issue forth, whether the door was open or not.

The door, however, was now shut, and the pass key proved serviceable; but no sooner did Mr. Wittingham stand in the passage of his own mansion than he stopped short in breathless and powerless astonishment; for there before him stood two figures in close confabulation, which he certainly did not expect to see in that place, at that time, in such near proximity.

The one was that of a woman, perhaps fifty-five years of age, but who looked still older from the fact of being dressed in the mode of thirty years before. Her garments might be those of an upper servant, and indeed they were so; for the personage was neither more nor less than the housekeeper, but to all appearance she was a resuscitated housekeeper of a former age; for the gown, padded in a long roll just under the blade-bones, the straight cut bodice, the tall but flat-crowned and wide-spreading cap, were not of the day in which she lived, and her face, too, was as dry as the outer shell of a cocoa-nut. The other figure had the back turned to the door, and was evidently speaking earnestly to Mrs. Billiter; but it was that of a man, tall, and, although slightly made, yet sinewy and strong.

Mr. Wittingham's breath came thick and short; but the noise of his suddenly opening the door, and his step in the hall, made the housekeeper utter a low cry of surprise, and caused her male companion to turn quickly round. Then Mr. Wittingham's worst apprehensions were realised, for the face he saw before him was that of his own son, though somewhat disfigured by an eye swollen and discoloured, and a deep long cut just over it on the brow.

The young man seemed surprised and confounded by the unexpected apparition of his father, but it was too late to shirk the encounter, though he well knew it would not be a pleasant one. He was accustomed, too, to scenes of altercation with his parent; for Mr. Wittingham had not proceeded wisely with his son, who was a mere boy when he himself retired from business. He had not only alternately indulged him and thwarted him, encouraged him to spend money largely, and to dazzle the eyes of the neighbours by expense, at the same time limiting his means and exacting a rigid account of his payments; but as the young

man had grown up, he had continued sometimes to treat him as a boy, sometimes as a man; and while he more than connived at his emulating the great in those pleasures which approach vices, he denied him the sums by which such a course could alone be carried out.

Thus a disposition naturally vehement and passionate had been rendered irritable and reckless, and a character self-willed and perverse had become obstinate and disobedient. Dispute after dispute arose between father and son after the spoilt boy became the daring and violent youth, till at length Mr. Wittingham, for the threefold purpose of putting him under some sort of discipline, of removing him from bad associates, and giving him the tone of a gentleman, had sent him to Oxford. One year had passed over well enough; but at the commencement of the second year, Mr. Wittingham found that his notions of proper economy were very different from his son's, and that Oxford was not likely to reconcile the difference. He heard of him horse-racing, driving stage-coaches, betting on pugilists, gambling, drinking, getting deeper and deeper in debt; and his letters of remonstrance were either not answered at all, or answered with contempt.

A time had come, however, when the absolute necessity of recruiting his finances from his father's purse had reduced the youth to promises of amendment and a feigned repentance; and just at the time our tale opens, the worthy magistrate was rocking himself in the cradle of delusive expectations, and laying out many a plan for the future life of his reformed son, when suddenly, as we have seen, he found him standing talking to the housekeeper in his own hall with the marks of a recent scuffle very visible on his face.

The consternation of Mr. Wittingham was terrible; for though by no means a man of ready combinations in any other matter than pounds, shillings, and pence, his fancy was not so slow a beast as to fail in joining together the description which Ned Hayward had given of the marks he had set upon one of the worthy gentlemen who had been found attacking Mrs. Clifford's carriage, and the cuts and bruises upon the fair face of his gentle offspring. He had also various private reasons of his own for supposing that such an enterprise as that which had been interrupted in Tarningham-lane, as the place was called, might very well come within the sphere of his son's energies, and for a moment he gave himself up to a sort of apathetic despair, seeing all his fond hopes of rustic rule and pro-

vincial importance dashed to the ground by the conduct of his own child.

It was reserved for that child to rouse him from his stupor, however; for, though undoubtedly the apparition of his father was anything but pleasant to Henry Wittingham, at that particular moment, when he was arranging with the housekeeper (who had aided to spoil him with all her energies) that he was to have secret board and lodging in the house for a couple of days, without his parent's knowledge, yet his was a bold spirit, not easily cowed, and much accustomed to outface circumstances, however disagreeable they might be. Marching straight up to his father, then, without a blush, as soon as he had recovered from the first surprise, he said, "So, you see I have come back, sir, for a day or two, to worship my household gods, as we say at Oxford, and to get a little more money, for you did not send me enough. However, it may be as well, for various reasons, not to let people know that I am here. Our old dons do not like us to be absent without leave, and may think that I ought to have notified to them my intention of giving you an agreeable surprise."

Such overpowering impudence was too much for Mr. Wittingham's patience, the stock of which was somewhat restricted; and he first swore a loud and very unmagisterial oath; then, however, recollecting himself, without abating one particle of his wrath, he said, in a stern tone and with a frowning brow, "Be so good as to walk into that room for five minutes, sir."

"Lord, sir—don't be angry!" exclaimed the housekeeper, who did not at all like the look of her master's face—"it is only a frolic, sir."

"Hold your tongue, Billiter! You are a fool," thundered Mr. Wittingham. "Walk in there, sir, and you shall soon hear my mind as to your frolics."

"Oh, certainly, I will walk in," replied his son, not appearing in the least alarmed, though there was something in the expression of his father's countenance that did frighten him a little, because he had never seen that something before—something difficult to describe—a struggle as it were with himself, which showed the anger he felt to be more profound than he thought it right to display at once. "I certainly will walk in, and take a cup of tea if you will give me one," and, as he spoke, he passed the door into the library.

"You will neither eat nor drink in this house more, till your conduct is wholly changed, sir," said Mr. Witting-

ham, shutting the door behind him; "the books are closed, sir—there is a large balance against you, and that must be liquidated before they can be opened again. What brought you here?"

- "What I have said," answered the young man, beginning to feel that his situation was not a very good one, but still keeping up his affected composure; "the yearnings of filial affection, and a lack of pocket-money."

"So, you can lie, too, to your father," said Wittingham, bitterly. "You will find that I can tell the truth, however, and to begin, I will inform you of what brought you hither—but no, it would take too much time to do that; for the sooner you are 'gone the better for yourself and all concerned—you must go, sir, I tell you—you must go directly."

A hesitation had come upon Mr. Wittingham while he spoke; his voice shook, his lip quivered, his tall frame was terribly agitated; and his son attributed all these external signs of emotion to a very different cause from the real one. He thought he saw in them the symptoms of a relenting parent, or at least of an irresolute one, and he prepared to act accordingly; while his father thought of nothing but the danger of having him found in his house, after the commission of such an outrage as that which he had perpetrated that night; but the very thought made him tremble in every limb—not so much for his son, indeed, as for himself.

"I beg pardon, my dear sir," replied the young man, recovering all his own impudence at the sight of his father's agitation, "but it would not be quite convenient for me to go to-night. It is late; I am tired; my purse is very empty."

"Pray how did you get that cut upon your head?" demanded the magistrate, abruptly.

"Oh, a little accident," replied his son; "it is a mere scratch—nothing at all."

• "It looks very much like a blow from the butt-end of a heavy horsewhip," said his father, sternly; "just such as a man who had stopped two ladies in a carriage might receive from a strong arm come to their rescue. You do not propose to go, then? Well, if that be the case, I must send for the constable and give you into his hands, for there is an information laid against you for felony, and witnesses ready to swear to your person. Shall I ring the bell, or do you go?"

The young man's face had turned deadly pale, and he crushed the two sides of his hat together between his

hands. He uttered but one word, however, and that was, "Money."

"Not a penny," answered Mr. Wittingham, turning his shoulder, "not one penny; you have had too much already—you would make me bankrupt and yourself too." The next moment, however, he continued, "Stay; on one condition, I will give you twenty pounds."

"What is it?" asked the son, eagerly, but somewhat fiercely, too, for he suspected that the condition would be hard.

"It is that you instantly go back to Oxford, and swear by all you hold sacred—if you hold anything sacred at all—not to quit it for twelve months, or till Mary Clifford is married."

"You ask what I cannot do," said the son, in a tone of deep and bitter despondency, contrasting strangely with that which he had previously used; "I cannot go back to Oxford. You must know all in time, and may as well know it now—I am expelled from Oxford; and you had your share in it; for had you sent me what I asked, I should not have been driven to do what I have done. I cannot go back; and as to abandoning my pursuit of Mary Clifford, I will not do that either. I love her, and she shall be mine, sooner or later, let who will say No."

"Expelled from Oxford!" cried Mr. Wittingham, with his eyes almost starting from their sockets. "Get out of my sight, and out of my house; go where you will—do what you will—you are no son of mine any more. Away with you, or I will myself give you into custody, and sign the warrant for your committal. Not a word more, sir—begone! you may take your clothes, if you will; but let me see no more of you. I cast you off; begone, I say."

"I go," answered his son; but one day you will repent of this, and wish me back, when perhaps you will not be able to find me."

"No fear of that," answered Mr. Wittingham; "if you do not return till I seek you, the house will be long free from your presence. Away with you at once, and no more words."

Without reply, Henry Wittingham quitted the room, and hurried up to the bed-chamber which he inhabited when he was at home, opened several drawers, and took out various articles of dress, and some valuable trinkets—a gold chain, a diamond brooch, two or three jewelled pins and rings. He lingered a little, perhaps fancying that his father might relent, perhaps calculating what his own conduct should be when he was summoned back to

the library. But when he had been about five minutes in his chamber, there was a tap at the door; and the house-keeper came in.

"It is no use, Billiter," said the young man; "I am going. My father has treated me shamefully."

"It is no use, indeed, Master Harry," replied the good woman; "he is as hard as stone. I have said everything he would let me say: but he drove me out of the room like a wild beast. But don't give it up, Master Harry. Go away for a day or two to Buxton's inn, by Chandleigh—he'll come round in time, and you can very well spend a week or so there, and be very comfortable."

"But money, Billiter—money!" exclaimed the young man, whose heart had sunk again to find that all his expectations of his father's resolution giving way were vain. "I have but a few pounds in my pocket. What shall I do for money?"

"Stay a bit—stay a bit," said the good woman; "what I have got you may have, Master Harry, as welcome as the flowers in May. I've ten pounds here in this little purse," and she dived into one of the large pockets that hung outside of her capacious petticoat, producing a very dirty old knitted purse with a steel clasp, and adding, as she placed it in her young master's hand, "It is a pity now that Mr. Wittingham wheedled me into putting all the rest of my earnings into the Tarningham bank, where he has a share—but that will do for the present, if you are careful, Master Harry—but don't go to drink claret and such expensive nasty stuff, there's a good boy!"

"That I won't, Billiter," answered Henry Wittingham, pocketing the money without remorse of conscience, "and I will repay you when I can—some day or another I shall certainly be able, for the houses at Exmouth are settled upon me;" and, packing up all that he thought fit to take in a large silk handkerchief, he opened the door again, and began to descend the stairs. A chilly sensation crept over him ere he reached the bottom, as memory brought back happy days, and he thought that he was going forth from the home of his youth, perhaps for ever; that he was an exile from his father's dwelling, from his love, an outcast, a wanderer, with nothing but his own wayward spirit for his guide—nought but his own pride for his support. He was not yet sufficiently hardened to bear the shadow of his exile lightly, to look upon it as a relief from restraint, a mere joyous adventure, which would have its interest during its progress, and would soon be over. But, nevertheless, his pride was strong, and, as yet unchecked;

and when the thought of going back to his father, asking his forgiveness, and promising all that he required, crossed his mind, he cast it from him with disdain, saying, "Never! never! He shall ask me humbly first." And, with this very lowly determination, he walked out of the house.

"I shall be able to hear of you at Buxton's, by Chandleigh," said the housekeeper, as he stood just beyond the threshold.

"Yes, yes, you will hear of me there," he replied; and descending the steps, he was soon wandering in darkness amongst parterres, every step of the way being as familiar to him as his father's library.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER a few words of common observation upon Mr. Wittingham and his proceedings when that excellent gentleman had left the room at the little inn of Tarningham, Ned Hayward fell into a very unusual fit of thought.

I do not mean in the least to say that it was unusual for Ned Hayward to think; for probably he thought as much as other men, but there are various ways of thinking. There are pondering, meditating, brown-studying, day-dreaming, revolving, considering, contemplating; and though many of these terms may at first sight seem synonymous, yet upon close examination it will be found that there are shades of difference between the meanings. Besides these ways or modes of thinking, there are various other mental processes, such as investigating, examining, disentangling, inquiring, but with these I will not meddle, as my business is merely with the various operations of the mind which require various degrees of rapidity. Now, though Ned Hayward, as I have said, probably thought as much as other men, his sort of thought was generally of a very quick and active habit. He was not fond of meditating, his mind's slowest pace was a canter, and when he found an obstacle of any kind—hedge, gate, fence, or stone wall—he took up his stirrups and went over it. Now, however, for once in his life, he paused and pondered for full five minutes; and then, thinking perhaps it might seem a little rude if he treated his new-found friend to nothing, but meditation, he began to talk of other things, still meditating over the former subject of his contemplations all the while.

It must not be supposed, however, that he did not think of what he was saying. Such a supposition might, indeed, be founded upon the old axiom that men cannot do two

things at once. But the axiom is false : there never was a falser. We are always doing many things at once. There would be very little use of our having hands and feet, tongues and eyes, ears and nose, unless each of our organs with a little practice could go on quite quietly in its little workshop, without disturbing the others. Indeed, it is very serviceable sometimes to give our more volatile members something light to do, when we are employing others upon more serious business, just to keep them out of the way, as we do with noisy children. So also is it with the mind and its faculties, and it is not only quite possible, depend upon it, dear reader, to think of two subjects at once, but very common also.

Totally unacquainted with Mr. Beauchamp's habits and character, or what topics he could converse upon, and what not, Ned Hayward naturally chose one which seemed perfectly indifferent and perfectly easy ; but it led them soon to deeper considerations, as a very small key will often open a very large door. It led to some political discussions, too ; but let it be remarked, this is not a political novel, that most wearisome and useless of all the legitimate off-springs of literature, and therefore if I give a few sentences of their conversation, it is not to insinuate sneakily my own opinions, but merely to display my characters more fully.

"This seems a very pretty little town," said Ned Hayward, choosing the first free subject at hand ; "quite rural, and with all the tranquillity of the country about it."

"It is, indeed," answered Mr. Beauchamp ; "but I should almost have supposed that a gayer place would have pleased you more. Were you never here before?"

"Never in my life," replied his companion ; "but you are quite mistaken about my tastes. London, indeed, is a very pleasant place for three months or so ; but one soon grows tired of it. It gets slow—very slow, after a while. One cannot go to the theatre every night. There is little use of going to balls and parties, and risking falling in love, if one has not money enough to marry. One gets weary of the faces and the houses in St. James's street. Morning visits are the greatest bores in the world. Epsom and Ascot are good enough things in their way, but they are soon over for one who does not bet and runs no horses. The newspapers tire me to death—romances I abominate ; and though a good opera comes in twice a-week to lighten the road a little, it gets desperately heavy on one's shoulders before the first of July. Antiquaries, connoisseurs, lawyers, physicians, fiddlers, and portrait-painters, with

merchants, and all the bees of the hive, may find London a very pleasant and profitable place. I am nothing but a drone, and so I fly away into the country. Of all towns after the second month, I hate London the most—except a manufacturing town, indeed, and that is always horrible—even to change horses in."

"And yet, perhaps," answered Beauchamp, "a manufacturing town offers subjects of deeper interest than any other spot of the earth—especially at the present moment."

"Not in themselves, surely," said Ned Hayward ; "the abstract idea of broad cloth is to me very flat, cotton-spinning not particularly exciting, iron ware is far too hard for me to handle, and as for the production of soda and pearl-ash, I have no genius that way. But I suppose," he continued, "you mean that the manufacturing towns are interesting from their bearing upon the prosperity of the country : but in that case, it is your speculations regarding them that interest you, not the places themselves."

"So it is with everything," answered Mr. Beauchamp ; "no single image or impression gives us great pleasure. It is in their combination that our enjoyment dwells. Single ideas are but straight lines, blank plains, monotonous patches of colour. Associate them with other shapes and hues, and you produce beauty and pleasure. Thus with the manufacturing towns ; if I only went to see a steam-engine work, a shuttle play, or a spindle turn, I should soon be tired enough ; but when in all that I behold there I perceive a new development of man's mind, a fresh course opened for his energies when old ones are exhausted, when I discover the commencement of a great social change, which shall convert the pursuits of tribes and nations from agricultural to manufacturing—or rather, which shall throw the great mass of human industry, for which its former sphere was too small, into another and almost interminable channel, I feel that I am a spectator of a great social phenomenon, as awful and as grand as the lightning that rends the pine, or the earthquake that overthrows the mountain. It is magnificent, yet terrible ; beautiful, but still sad."

"Why sad ?" demanded Ned Hayward. "I have considered the matter in the same light a little, and have talked with various grave manufacturers about it ; but they all seem to see nothing in it but what is very fine and pleasant. They have no apprehension for the result, or doubts about its doing a great deal of good to everybody in the end."

"The end !" said Beauchamp. "Where is the end ?

What will the end be? They see nothing but good; they augur nothing but good, because they are actively employed in that one particular course, and buoyed up with those sanguine expectations which active exertion always produces. Neither do I doubt that the end will be good; but still, ere that end be reached, how much misery, how much strife, how much evil must be encountered! One needs but to set one's foot in a factory, ay, or in a manufacturing town, to see that the evil not only will be, but is, that we are wading into a dark stream which we must pass over, and are already knee deep. I speak not of the evils inseparable from the working of any great change in the relations of society, or in its objects. As we can never climb a hill without some fatigue, so we can never reach a higher point in social advance without some suffering; but that inevitable evil I look upon as light, compared with many other things' before us. I doubt not that in God's good providence new resources will be ever opened before mankind for the employment of human industry; but when I see even a temporary superfluity of labour, I tremble to think of what vast power of grinding and oppressing that very circumstance places in the hands of the employer. Combine that power with the state of men's minds at present, and all the tendencies of the age; remember that to accumulate wealth, to rival others in luxury and display, to acquire at any price and by any means, is a part not of the manufacturer's spirit, but of the spirit of the age, and especially of this country, and then see to what purposes must and will be applied that vast authority or command which the existing superabundance of labour, brought about by mechanical inventions, and the natural increase of population, intrusts to those who have already the power of wealth. Were it not for this spirit acting through this power, should we see in our manufactories such squalid misery, such enfeebled frames, such overtaxed exertions, such want of moral and religious culture, such recklessness, such vice, such infamy, such famine?"

"Perhaps not," answered Ned Hayward; "but yet something is to be said for the manufacturers, too. You see, my good sir, they have to compete with all Europe. They are, as it were, running a race, and they must win it, even if they break their horses' wind."

"If they do that, they will lose it," replied Beauchamp; "but yet I do not blame them. I blame the spirit of the times we live in. They only share it with other men; many of them are humane, kind, generous, just, who do

as much good and as little evil as the iron hand of circumstances will permit; and were all to strive in the same manner, and to the same degree, that iron hand would be broken, and all would be wiser, happier, better—ay, even wealthier than they are; but, alas! the example of the good has little influence on the rest on the same level with themselves; and the example of the bad, immense influence on every grade beneath them. The cupidity of the great mill-owner is imitated and exceeded by those below him. He robs the poor artizan of his labour, by allowing him as little out of the wealth his exertions earn as the superfluity of industry compels the artizan to take, and justifies himself with the cold axiom, that he is not bound to pay more than other men; those in authority below him rob the same defenceless being of a great part of even those poor wages by a more direct kind of plunder, and have their axiom too. One of the great problems of the day is this: what proportion of the profits accruing from the joint operation of capital and labour is to be assigned to each of those two elements? And the day will come ere long, depend upon it, when that great problem must be solved—I trust, not in bloody characters. At present, there is no check to secure a fair division; and so long as there is none, wealth will always take advantage of poverty, and the competition for mere food will induce necessity to submit to avarice, till the burden becomes intolerable—and then——”

“What then?” asked Ned Hayward.

“Nay, God forbid,” answered Beauchamp, “that the fears which will sometimes arise should ever be verified. A thousand unforeseen events may occur to waft away the dangers that seem to menace us; but I cannot help thinking that in the meantime there are many duties neglected by those who have the power to interfere; for, surely, if any foresight be wisdom, any human providence a virtue, they are the foresight which perceives the future magnitude of evils yet in the bud, and the providence that applies a remedy in time.”

“Very true,” answered Ned Hayward; “things do look rather badly; but I dare say all will get right at last. I have not thought of such things very deeply—not half so deeply as you have done, I know; but still I have been sorry to see, in many of our great towns, the people so wretched-looking; and sometimes I have thought that if better care were taken of them—I mean both in mind and body—our judges at the assizes would not have so much to do. Just as fevers spread through whole countries from

a great congregation of sickly people, so crimes extend through a land from great congregations of vicious people. For my part, if, like our good friend Abon Hassan, I could but be caliph for a short time, I'd open out all the narrow streets, and drain all the foul lands, and cultivate all ignorant minds, and try to purify all the corrupt hearts, by the only thing that can purify them. But I am not caliph; and if I were, the task is above me, I fancy: but still, if it could be accomplished, even in part, I am quite sure that jurymen would dine earlier, lawyers have less to do, courts would rise at three o'clock, and the lord mayor and sheriffs eat their turtle more in peace. But talking of that, do you know I have been thinking all this while, how we could get some insight into this affair of the highway robbery; for I am determined I will not let the matter sleep. Highway robberies are going quite out of fashion. I have not heard of one for these four months. Hounslow Heath is almost as safe as Berkeley-square, and Bagshot no more to be feared than Windsor Castle. It is a pity to let such things revive; and there is something about that old fellow Wittingham which strikes me as odd. Another thing, too, was funny enough. Why should they pull the young lady out of the chaise? She could just as well have handed her purse and her trinkets out of the window!"

"That seemed strange to me also," answered Beauchamp. "But how do you propose to proceed?"

"Why, I think the best way will be to frighten the post-boy," replied Ned Hayward. "He's in league with the rogues, whoever they are, depend upon it; and if he thinks his neck's in a noose, he'll peach."

"That is not improbable," said his companion: "but we had better proceed cautiously; for if we frighten him into denying all knowledge of the parties, he will adhere to his story for mere consistency's sake."

"Oh, I'll manage him—I will manage him," answered Ned Hayward, who had carried so many points in his life by his dashing straightforwardness, that he had very little doubt of his own powers. "Come along, and we will see. Let us saunter out into the yard, in a quiet, careless way, as if we were sentimental, and loved moonlight. We shall find him somewhere rubbing down his horses, or drinking a pint on the bench."

The two gentlemen accordingly took their hats, and issued forth, Ned Hayward leading the way first out into the street through a glass-door, and then round into the yard by an archway. This manoeuvre was intended to

elude the vigilant eyes of Mr. Groomer, and was so far successful that the landlord, being one of that small class of men who can take a hint, did not come out after them to offer his services, though he saw the whole proceeding, and while he was uncorking sherry, or portioning out tea, or making up a bill, kept one eye—generally the right—turned towards a window that looked in the direction of the stables. Before those stables the bright moon was laying out her silver carpeting, though, truth to say, she might have found a cleaner floor to spread it on; and there, too, paraded up and down our friends, Ned Hayward and Mr. Beauchamp, looking for the post-boy who had driven Mrs. Clifford and her daughter, but, not perceiving him in any direction, Ned Hayward began to suspect he had reckoned without his host. The man was not rubbing down his horses, he was not drinking a pint on the bench, he was not smoking a pipe at the inn door.

"Well," he said at length, "I will look into all the stables to see after my horse. It is but right I should attend to his supper now I have had my own, and perhaps we may find what we are looking for on the road. Let us wait awhile, however, till that one-eyed ostler is passed, or he will tell us where the horse is, and spoil our manoeuvre." And, walking on, he pointed out to Beauchamp a peculiar spot upon the moon's surface, and commented upon it, with face upturned, till the inconvenient ostler had gone by.

At that moment, however, another figure appeared in the yard, which at once brought light into Ned Hayward's mind. It was not a pretty figure, nor had it a pretty face belonging to it. The back was bowed and contorted in such a manner as to puzzle the tailor exceedingly to fit it with a fustian jacket when it required a new one, which luckily was not often; the legs were thin, and more like a bird's than a human being's, and though the skull was large and not badly shaped, the features that appeared below the tall forehead seemed all to be squeezed together, so as to acquire a rat-like expression, not uncommon in the deformed. The head, which was bare, was thatched with thin yellow hair, but the eyes were black and clear, and the teeth large and white. The garments which this poor creature wore were those of an inferior servant of an inn: and his peculiar function seemed to be denoted by a tankard of beer, which he carried in his hand from the door of the tap towards the stables.

"He is carrying our friend his drink," said Ned Hay-

ward, in a whisper to Beauchamp, "let us watch where the little pot-boy goes in, and I'll take seven to one we find the man we want."

The pot-boy gave a shrewd glance at the two gentlemen as he passed them, but hurried on towards one of the doors far down the yard, which, when it was opened, displayed a light within; and as soon as he had deposited his tankard and returned, those who had watched him followed his course, and threw back the same door without ceremony. There before them, seated astride on a bench, was the post-boy of whom they were in search. They had both marked him well by the evening light, and there could be no doubt of his identity, though by this time he had got his hat and jacket off, and was sitting with a mane-comb on one hand and a currycomb on the other, and the tankard of beer between them. He was a dull, unpleasant, black-bearded sort of fellow of fifty-five or six, with a peculiarly cunning gray eye, and a peculiarly resolute slow mouth; and as soon as Ned Hayward beheld the expression by the light of a tallow-candle in a high state of perspiration, he muttered, "We shall not make much of this specimen."

Nevertheless, he went on in his usual careless tone addressing the lord of the posting-saddle, and saying, "Good night, my man; I want you to tell me where I can find a gentleman I wish to see hercabouts."

The post-boy had risen, and pulled the lock of short black and white hair upon his forehead, but without looking a bit more communicative than at first, and he merely answered, "If I knows where he lives, sir. What's his name?"

"Why, that's another matter," replied Ned Hayward; "perhaps he may not much like his name mentioned; but I can tell you what people call him sometimes. He goes by the name of Wolf occasionally."

The slightest possible twinkle of intelligence came into the man's eyes for a moment, and then went out again, just as, when clouds are driving over the sky at night, we sometimes see something sparkle for an instant, and then disappear from the heavens, so faint while it is present, and so soon gone, that we cannot tell whether it be a star or not.

"Can't say I ever heard of such a gemman here, sir," replied the post-boy. "There is Billy Lamb, sir, the pot-boy, but that's the nearest name to Wolf we have in these parts."

"Why, my good friend, you saw him this very night,"

said Mr. Beauchamp, "when the chaise was stopped that you were driving. He was one of the principals in that affair."

"Likely, sir," answered the other, "but they were all strangers to me—never set eyes on one on 'em afore. But if you knows 'em, you'll soon catch 'em; and that will be a good job, for it is very unpleasant to be kept a waiting so. It's as bad as a 'pike."

"I've a notion," said Ned Hayward, "that you can find out my man for me if you like; and if you do, you may earn a crown; but if you do not, you may get into trouble, for concealing felons renders you what is called an accessory, and that is a capital crime. You know the law, sir," he continued, turning to Beauchamp, and speaking in an authoritative tone, "and if I am not mistaken, this comes under the statute of limitations as a clear case of misprision, which under the old law was merely burning in the hand and transportation for life, but is now hanging matter. You had better think over the business, my man, and let me have an immediate answer with due deliberation, for you are not a person, I should think, to put your head in a halter, and, if you were, I should not advise you to do so in this case."

"Thank you, sir," said the post-boy, "I won't; but I don't know the gemmen as showed themselves such rum customers, nor him either as you are a axing arter."

"It is in vain, I fear," said Beauchamp to his companion, in a very low voice, as their respondent made this very definite answer; "the magistrates may perhaps obtain some further information from him when he finds that the matter is serious, but we shall not."

The post-boy caught a few of the words apparently, and perhaps it was intended that he should do so, but they were without effect; and when at length they walked away baffled, he twisted the eyelid into a sort of wreath round his left eye, observing, with his tongue in his cheek, "Ay, ay, my covies—no go!"

Ned Hayward opened the door somewhat suddenly, and as he went out, he almost tumbled over the little hump-backed pot-boy. Now whether the young gentleman—his years might be nineteen or twenty, though his stature was that of a child of eight—came thither to replenish the tankard he had previously brought, or whether he affected the moonlight, or was fond of conversation in which he did not take a part, Ned Hayward could not at the moment divine; but before he and Beauchamp had taken a dozen steps up the yard, Hayward felt a gentle pull at his coat-tail.

"What is it, my lad?" he said, looking down upon the pot-boy, and at the same time stooping his head as if with a full impression that his ears at their actual height could hear nothing that proceeded from a point so much below as the deformed youth's mouth.

Instantly a small high-pitched but very musical voice replied, "I'll come for your boots early to-morrow, sir, and tell you all about it."

"Can't you tell me, now?" asked the young gentleman; "I am going into the stable to see my horse, and you can say your say there, my man."

"I daren't," answered the pot-boy; "there's Tim the Ostler, and Jack Millman's groom, and Long Billy, the Taunton post-boy, all about. I'll come to-morrow and fetch your boots."

At the same moment the landlord's voice, exclaiming in sharp tones, "Billy! Billy Lamb!—what the devil are you so long about?" was heard, and the pot-boy ran off as fast as his long thin legs would carry him.

"Well, this affair promises some amusement," said Ned Hayward, when they had again reached the little parlour, which in his good-humoured easy way he now looked upon as common to them both. "Upon my word, I am obliged to these highwaymen, or whatever the scoundrels may be, for giving me something fresh to think of. Although at good Sir John Slingsby's I shall have fishing enough, I dare say, yet one cannot fish all day and every day, and sometimes one gets desperately bored in an old country house, unless fate strikes out something not quite in the common way to occupy one."

"Did you ever try falling in love?" asked Beauchamp, with a quiet smile, as he glanced his eyes over the fine form and handsome features of his companion; "it is an excellent pastime, I am told."

"No!" answered Ned Hayward, quickly and straightforwardly; "I never did, and never shall. I am too poor, Mr. Beauchamp, to marry in my own class of society, and maintain my wife in the state which that class implies. I am too honest to make love without intending to marry; too wise, I trust, to fall in love where nothing could be the result but unhappiness to myself, if not to another also." He spoke these few sentences very seriously; but then, resuming at once his gay rattling manner, he went on: "Oh, I have drilled myself capitally, I assure you. At twenty I was like a raw recruit, bungling at every step; found myself saying all manner of sweet things to every pretty face I met; felt my heart beating whenever, under

the pretty face, I thought I discovered something that would last longer. But I saw so much of love in a cottage and its results, that, after calculating well what a woman brought up in good society would have to sacrifice who married a man with 600*l.* a-year, I voted it unfair to ask her, and made up my mind to my conduct. As soon as ever I find that I wish to dance with any dear girl twice in a night, and fall into reveries when I think of her, and feel a sort of warm blood at my fingers' ends when my hand touches, I am off like a hair trigger ; for if a man is bound to act with honour to other men, who can make him if he does not willingly, he is ten times more strongly bound to do so towards women, who can neither defend nor avenge themselves."

With a sudden impulse Beauchamp held out his hand to him, and shook his heartily ; and that grasp seemed to say, "I know you now to the heart. We are friends."

Ned Hayward was a little surprised at this enthusiastic burst of Mr. Beauchamp, for he had set him down for what is generally called a very gentlemanlike person, which means, in the common parlance of the world, a man who has either used up everything like warm feeling, or has never possessed it, and who, not being troubled with any emotions, suffers polite manners and conventional habits to rule him in and out. With his usual rapid way of jumping at conclusions—which he often found very convenient, though, to say the truth, he sometimes jumped over the right ones—he said to himself at once, "Well, this is really a good fellow, I do believe, and a man of some heart and soul."

But though Beauchamp's warm shake of the hand had led him to this conviction, and he thought he began to understand him, yet Ned Hayward was a little curious as to a question which his new friend had asked him some time before. He had answered it, it is true, by telling him that he took care not to fall in love ; but he fancied that Mr. Beauchamp had inquired in a peculiar tone, and that he must have had some meaning more than the words implied ; taken in their simple and straightforward application.

"Come now, tell me, Beauchamp," he said, after just five seconds' consideration, "what made you ask if I had ever tried falling in love by way of amusement ? Did you ever hear any story of my being guilty of such practices ? If you have, it was no true one—at least, for six or seven years past."

"Oh, no !" replied Beauchamp, laughing ; "I have had

no means of learning your secret history. I only inquired because, if you have never tried that pleasant amusement, you will soon have a capital opportunity. Sir John Slingsby's daughter is one of the loveliest girls I ever saw."

"What, old Jack with a daughter!" exclaimed Ned Hayward, and then added, after a moment's thought—"By the way, so he had. I remember her coming to see him at his quarters. I had forgotten all about it. A pretty little girl she was; I think five or six years old. Let me see, she must be about sixteen or seventeen now; for that is just eleven years ago, when I was an ensign."

"She is more than that," answered Beauchamp, "by two or three years; and either it must be longer since you saw her, or——"

"Oh, no; it is just eleven years ago!" cried Captain Hayward; "eleven years, next month, for I was then seventeen myself."

"Well, then, she must have been older than you thought," replied his companion:

"Very likely," said Ned Hayward. "I never could tell girls' ages, especially when they are children. But there is no fear of my falling in love with her, if she is what you tell me. I never fell in love with a beautiful woman in my life—I don't like them; they are always either pert, or conceited, or vain, or haughty, or foolish. Sooner or later they are sure to find some ass to tell them how beautiful they are, and then they think that is quite sufficient for all the purposes of life."

"Perhaps because they are first impressed with a wrong notion of the purposes of life," answered Beauchamp; "but yet I never heard of a man before who objected to a woman because she was pretty."

"No, no," answered Ned Hayward, "that is a very different thing. I did not say pretty. I am very fond of what is pretty. Oh, the very word is delightful! It gives one such a nice, good-humoured, comfortable idea; it is full of health, and youth, and good spirits, and light-heartedness—the word seems to smile and speak content; and when it is the expression that is spoken of, and not the mere features, it is very charming indeed. But a beautiful woman is a very different thing. I would as soon marry the Venus de Medicis, pedestal and all, as what is usually called a beautiful woman. But now let us talk of this other affair. I wonder what will come of my mysterious pot-boy!"

"Why, I doubt not you will obtain some information regarding the gentleman calling himself Wolf," replied

Beauchamp; "but if you do, how do you intend to proceed?"

"Hunt him down as I would a wolf," answered Ned Hayward.

"Then, pray let me share the sport," rejoined Beauchamp.

"Oh! certainly, certainly," said Ned Hayward; "I'll give the view halloo as soon as I have found him; and so now, good night, for I am somewhat sleepy."

"Good night, good night!" answered Beauchamp; and Ned Hayward rang for a bed-candle, a boot-jack, a pair of slippers, and sundry other things that he wanted, which were brought instantly, and with great good will. Had he asked for a night-cap it would have been provided with the same alacrity; for those were days in which night-caps were furnished by every host to every guest: though now (alas! for the good old times) no landlord ever thinks that a guest will stay long enough in his house to make it worth while to attend to his head-gear. But Ned Hayward needed no night-cap, for he never wore one, and therefore his demands did not at all overtax his host's stock.

CHAPTER V.

It was in the gray of the morning that a man in a velveteen jacket was seen walking slowly along by the margin, at a spot where the river was in a sort of middle state, neither so fierce and restive as it seemed amongst the hills, nor so tranquil and sluggish as in the neighbourhood of the little town. There were green fields around; and numerous trees and copses, approaching sometimes very close to the water, but sometimes breaking away to a considerable distance, but generally far enough off for the angler to throw a fly without hooking the branches around. Amongst some elms, and walnuts, and Huntingdon poplars on the right bank, was an old square tower of very rough stone, gray and cold-looking, with some ivy up one side, clustering round the glassless window. It might have been mistaken for the ruin of some ancient castle of no great extent, had it not been for the axletree and some of the spokes and fellies of a dilapidated water-wheel projecting over the river, and at once announcing for what purpose the building had been formerly used, and that they had long ceased. There was still a little causeway and small stone bridge of a single arch spanning a rivulet that here and there joined the stream, and from a door-way near the

wheel still stretched a frail plank to the other side of the dam, which, being principally constructed of rude layers of rock, remained entire, and kept up the water so as to form an artificial cascade. Early as was the hour, some matutinal trout, who, having risen by times, and perhaps taken a long swim before breakfast, felt hungry and sharpset, were attempting to satisfy their voracious maws by snapping at a number of fawn-coloured moths which imprudently trusted themselves too near the surface of the water. The religious birds were singing their sweet hymns all around, and a large goatsucker whirled by on his long wings, depriving the trout of many a delicate fly before it came within reach of the greedy jaws that were waiting for it below the ripple.

But what was the man doing, while fish, flies, and birds were thus engaged? Marry, he was engaged in a very curious and mysterious occupation. With a slow step and a careful eye fixed upon the glassy surface beneath him, he walked along the course of the current, down towards the park paling that you see there upon the left. Was he admiring the speckled tenants of the river? Was he admiring his own reflected image on the shining mirror of the stream? He might be doing either or both; but, nevertheless, he often put his finger and thumb into the pocket of a striped waistcoat, and pulled out some small round balls, about the size of a pea or a little larger, marvellously like one of those boluses which doctors are sometimes fain to prescribe, and chemists right willing to furnish, but which patients find it somewhat difficult to swallow. These he dropped one by one into the water, wherever he found a quiet place, and thus proceeded till he had come within about three hundred yards of the park wall. There he stopped the administration of these pills; and then, walking a little further, sat down by the side of the river, in the very midst of a tall clump of rushes.

In a minute or two something white, about the length of eighteen inches, floated down; and, instantly stretching forth a long hooked stick, our friend drew dexterously in to the shore a fine large trout of a pound and a half in weight. The poor fellow was quite dead, or at least so insensible that he did not seem at all surprised or annoyed to find himself suddenly out of his element, and into another gentleman's pocket, though the transition was somewhat marvellous, from the fresh clear stream to a piece of glazed buckram. Most people would have disliked the change, but Mister Trout was in that sort of state that he did not care about anything. Hardly was he thus deposited

when one of his finny companions—perhaps his own brother, or some other near relation—was seen coming down the stream with his stomach upwards, a sort of position which, to a trout, is the same as standing on the head would be to a human being. This one was nearer the bank; and first he hit his nose against a stump of tree; then, whirling quietly round, he tried the current tail foremost; but it was all of no avail, he found his way, likewise, into the pocket, and two more were easily consigned to the same receptacle, all of them showing the same placid equanimity. At length, one very fine fish, which seemed to weigh two pounds and a half at the least, followed advice, and took a middle course. He was out of reach of the stick; the water was too deep at that spot to wade, and what was our friend of the pocket to do? He watched the fish carried slowly down the stream towards the place where the river passed under an archway into Sir John Slingsby's park. It was fat and fair, and its fins were rosy as if the morning sun had tinged them. Its belly was of a glossy white, with a kindly look about its half-expanded gills, that quite won our friend's affection. Yet he hesitated; and being a natural philosopher, he knew that by displacing the atoms of waters the floating body might be brought nearer to the shore. He therefore tried a stone: but whether he threw it too far, or not far enough, I cannot tell; certain it is, the trout was driven further away than before, and to his inexpressible disappointment, he saw it carried through the arch. He was resolved, however, that it should not thus escape him. Difficult circumstances try, if they do not make, great men; and taking a little run, he vaulted over the park paling and into the park.

He was just in the act of getting over again—perhaps feeling if he stayed too long it might be considered an intrusion—and had the fish in his hand, so that his movements were somewhat embarrassed, when a little incident occurred which considerably affected his plans and purposes for the day.

I have mentioned an old mill, and sundry trees and bushes at different distances from the bank, breaking the soft green meadow turf in a very picturesque manner. In the present instance, those various objects proved not only ornamental but useful—at least to a personage who had been upon the spot nearly as long as our friend in the velveteen jacket. That personage had been tempted into the mill either by its curious and ancient aspect, or by the open door, or by surprise, or by some other circumstance or motive; and once in, he thought he might as well look out of

the window. When he did look out of the window, the first thing his eyes fell upon was the first-mentioned gentleman dropping his pills into the water; and there being something curious and interesting in the whole proceeding, the man in the mill watched the man by the river for some minutes. He then quietly slipped out, and, as the door was on the opposite side from that on which the operations I have described were going on, he did so unperceived. It would seem that the watcher became much affected by what he saw, for the next minute he glided softly over the turf behind a bush, and thence to a clump of trees, and then to a single old oak, with a good wide trunk—rather hollow, and somewhat shattered about the branches, but still with two or three of the lower boughs left, having a fair show of leaves, like a fringe of curly hair round the poll of some bald Anacreon. From that he went to another, and so on; in fact, dodging our first friend all the way down, till the four first trout were pocketed, and the fifth took its course into the park. When the betrayer of these tender innocents, however, vaulted over the paling in pursuit, the dodger came out and got behind some bushes—brambles, and other similar shrubs, which have occasionally other uses than bearing blackberries; and no sooner did he see the successful chaser of the trout, with his goodly fish in his hand, and one leg over the paling, about to return to the open country, than taking two steps forward, he laid his hand upon his collar, and courteously helped him over somewhat faster than he would have come without such assistance.

The man of fishes had his back to his new companion at the moment when he received such unexpected support; but as soon as his feet had touched the ground on the other side, he struggled most unreasonably to free his collar from the grasp that still retained it. He did not succeed in this effort; far from it; for he well-nigh strangled himself in the attempt to get out of that iron clutch; but nevertheless, he contrived, at the risk of suffocation, to bring himself face to face with his tenacious friend, and beheld, certainly what he did not expect to see. No form of grim and grisly gamekeeper was before him; no shooting-jacket and leathern leggings; but a person in the garb of a gentleman of good station, furnished with arms, legs, and chest of dimensions and materials which seemed to show that a combat would neither be a very safe nor pleasant affair.

“Who the devil are you?” asked the lover of trout, in the same terms which Mr. Wittingham had used the night before to the very same personage.

“Ha, ha, my friend!” exclaimed Ned Hayward; “so you have been hocussing the trout, have you?” And there they stood for a few minutes, without any answers to either question.

CHAPTER VI.

OF all the turnings and windings in this crooked life, one of the most disagreeable is turning back; and yet it is one we are all doomed to from childhood to old age. We are turned back with the smaller and the greater lessons of life, and have, alas, but too often in our obstinacy or our stupidity, to learn them over and over again! I with the rest of my herd must also turn back from time to time; but on the present occasion it shall not be for a long way.

We have seen our good friend, Ned Hayward, lay his hand stoutly on the collar of a gentleman who had been taking some unwarrantable liberties with the finny fair ones of the stream; but the question is, how happened Ned Hayward to be there at that particular hour of the morning? Was he so exceedingly matutinal in his habits as to be usually up, dressed, and out and walking by a piece of water, at a period of the day when most things except birds, fish, and poachers, are in their beds? Had he been roused at that hour by heartache, or headache, or any other ache? Was he gouty and could not sleep? in love, and not inclined to sleep? No, reader—no. He was an early man in his habits, it is true, for he was in high health and spirits, and with a busy and active mind, which looked upon slumber as time thrown away; but then, though he rose early, he was always careful as to his dress. He had a stiff beard, which required a good deal of shaving; his hair took him a long time, for he liked it to be exceedingly clean and glossy. Smooth he could, not make it, for that the curls prevented—curls being obstinate things, and resolved to have their own way. Thus, with one thing or another, sometimes reading scraps of a book that lay upon his dressing-table, sometimes looking out of window, and thinking more poetically than he had any notion of, sometimes cleaning his teeth till they looked as white and as straight as the keys of a new pianoforte, sometimes playing some with his fingers on the top of the table, and musing philosophically the while, it was generally at least one hour and a half from the time he arose before he issued forth into the world.

This was not always the case, indeed; for on May morn-

ings, when the trout rise—in August, if he were near the moors—on the first of September, wherever he might be, for he was never at that season in London—he usually abridged his toilet, and might be seen in the green fields, duly equipped for the sport of the season, very shortly after daybreak.

On the present occasion, and the morning of which I have just spoken, there cannot be the slightest doubt that he would have lain in bed somewhat longer than usual, for he had had a long ride the day before, some excitement, and a good supper; but there was one little circumstance which roused him and sent him forth. At about a quarter before five, he heard his door open, and a noise made amongst the boots and shoes. He was in that sleepy state in which the events of even five or six hours before are vague and indefinite, if recollected at all; and although he had some confused notion of having ordered himself to be called early, yet he knew not the why or the wherefore, and internally concluded that it was one of the servants of the inn come to take his clothes away for the purpose of brushing them. He thought, as that was a process with which he had nothing to do, he might as well turn on his other side, and sleep it out. Still, however, there was a noise in the room, which in the end disturbed him, and he gave over all the boots, physical or metaphysical, to the devil. Then raising himself upon his elbow, he looked about, and by the dim light which was streaming through the dimity curtains—for the window was unfurnished with shutters—he saw a figure somewhat like that of a large goose wandering about amidst the fragments of his apparel.

"What in the mischief's name are you about?" asked Ned Hayward, impatiently. "Can't you take the things and get along?"

"It's me, sir," said the low, sweet-toned voice of the humpbacked pot-boy, who had not a perfect certainty in his own mind that neuter verbs are followed by a nominative case, "you were wishing to know last night about——"

"Ah, hang it, so I was!" exclaimed Ned Hayward; "but I had forgotten all about it. Well, my man, what can you tell me about this fellow—this Wolf? Where does he live—how can one get at him? None of the people here will own they know anything about him, but I believe they are lying, and I am very sure of it. The name's a remarkable one, and not to be mistaken."

"Ay, sir," answered the pot-boy, "they knew well

enough whom you want, though you did not mention the name they chose to know him by. Wolf's a cant name, you see, which he got on account of his walking about so much at night, as they say wolves do, though I never saw one."

"Well, where is he to be found?" asked Ned Hayward, in his usual rapid manner, and he then added, to smooth down all difficulties, "I don't want to do the man any harm, for I have a notion, somehow, that he is but a tool in the business; and therefore, although I could doubtless find him out sooner or later, and deal with him as I think fit, yet I would rather have his address privately, that I may go and talk to him alone."

"Ah, sir, he may be a tool," answered the pot-boy, "but he's an awkward tool to work with. I could tell you something about him, if I were quite sure you did not intend him any harm, because he is not a bad fellow at heart, sir."

"I do not intend to harm him, upon my honour," replied Ned Hayward; "and you may trust me safely, my man."

"I am sure I can, sir," answered the lad. "You do not look like one to harm a poor fellow. Well, if you had asked the people for Ste Gimlet, they'd have been obliged to answer; for they can't deny having heard of him."

"But where does he live? How am I to find him?" asked Ned Hayward.

"That's not quite so easy, sir," replied the hunchback, "for he wanders about a good deal, but he has got a place where he says he lives on Yaldon Moor, behind the park: and that he's there some time in every day is certain. I should think the morning as good a time as any, and you may catch him on the look-out if you go round by the back of the park, and then up the river by the old mill. There's an overgo a little higher up, and I shouldn't wonder if he were dabbling about in the water; for it isn't the time for partridges or hares, and he must be doing something."

"But what sort of a place has he on the moor?" asked Ned Hayward, beginning to get more and more interested in the pursuit of his inquiries; "how can I find it, my man?"

"It's not easy," answered his companion, "for it's built down in the pit. However, when you have crossed by the overgo, you will find a little path just before you, and if you go along that straight, without either turning to the right or the left, it will lead you right up to the moor."

Then I'm sure I don't know how to direct you, for the roads go turning about in all manner of ways."

"Is it east, west, north, or south?" asked Captain Hayward, impatiently.

"Why, east," answered the boy; "and I dare say, if you go soon, you will find the sun just peeping out over the door in that direction. It's a pretty sight (and I've looked at it often) to see the sunshine come streaming through the morning mist, and making all the green things that grow about there look like gold and purple; and very often, too, I've seen the blue smoke coming up out of the pit from Ste's cottage-chimney. Perhaps it may be so when you go, and then you'll easily find it."

"And whose park is it you speak of, boy?" said Ned Hayward. "There may be half a dozen about here."

"Why, Sir John Slingsby's," answered the boy; "that's the only one we call the Park about here."

"Oh, then, I know it," rejoined the gentleman, stretching out his hand at the same time, and taking his purse from a chair that stood by his bedside; "there's a crown for you; and now carry off the boots and clothes, and get them brushed as fast as possible."

The boy did as he was told, took the crown with many thanks, gathered together the various articles of apparel which lay scattered about, and retired from the room. Ned Hayward, however, without waiting for his return, jumped out of bed, drew forth from one of his portmanteaus another complete suit of clothes, plunged his head, hands, and neck in cold water, and then mentally saying, "I will shave when I come back; there is no use of wakening Beauchamp," he dressed himself in haste, and looked out for a moment into the yard, to see whether many of the members of the household were astir. There was a man at the very further end of the yard cleaning a horse, and just under the window the little deformed pot-boy, whistling a plaintive air with the most exquisite taste, while he was brushing a coat and waistcoat. The finest and most beautiful player on the flageolet never equalled the tones that were issuing from his little pale lips, and Ned Hayward could not refrain from pausing a moment to listen; but then putting on his hat, he hurried down stairs, and beckoned the boy towards him.

"Do not say that I am out, my man, unless any questions are asked," he said; "and when you have brushed the clothes, put them on a chair at the door."

The boy nodded significantly; and our friend Ned Hayward, took his way out of the town in the direction which

the boy had indicated, and walked straight on out of the little town, along the bank of the river, and finding himself interrupted, after about three miles, by the park wall, he took a path through the fields to the left, then struck back again to the right, and soon after had a glimpse of the river again above its passage through Sir John Slingsby's park and the old mill.

"What a picturesque ruin that is; it looks like some feudal castle beside the water parting two hostile barons' domains! What the deuce can it have been?"

Doubt with him always led to examination, so, without more ado, he crossed over the open space with his usual quick step, entered the mill, looked about him, satisfied himself in a minute as to what had been its destination, and then gazed out of the windows, first up the stream and next down. Up the stream he saw some swallows skimming over the water, the first that summer had brought to our shores; and, moreover, a sedate heron, with its blue back appearing over some reeds, one leg in the water, and one raised to its breast. When he looked down, however, he perceived the gentleman I have described, dropping some pellets into the water, and he thought "That's a curious operation. What can he be about?"

The next minute, however, the illegitimate wooer of the fishes turned his face partly towards the mill, and Ned Hayward murmured, "Ah, ha, Master Wolf, alias Ste Gimlet, I have you now, I think." And issuing forth, he dogged him down the bank as I have before described, till at length, choosing his moment dexterously, he grasped him by the collar in such a manner, that if he had had the strength of Hercules, he would have found it a more difficult matter to escape, than to kill forty Hydras, or clean fifty Augean stables.

"Hocussing the fish!" said the prisoner, in answer to one of Captain Hayward's first intimations of what he thought of his proceedings. "I don't know what you mean by hocussing the fish—I've got a few dead 'uns out of the river—that's all; and no great harm, I should think, just to make a fry."

"Ay, my good friend," replied Ned Hayward, "dead enough, I dare say they were when you got them; but I'm afraid we must have a coroner's inquest upon them, and I do not think the verdict will be 'Found drowned.' What I mean, my man, is, that you have poisoned them—a cunning trick, but one that I know as well as your name or my own."

"And what the devil is your name?" asked the captive, trying to twist himself round, so as at least to get a blow or a kick at his captor.

"Be quiet—be quiet!" answered Ned Hayward, half strangling him in his collar. "My name is my own property, and I certainly will not give it to you; but your own you shall have, if you like. You are called Ste Gimlet, or I am mistaken, but better known at night by the name of Wolf."

The man muttered an angry growl, and Ned Hayward continued,—

"You see I know all about you; and, to tell you the truth, I was looking for you."

"Ah, so he's had some 'un down from London," said Wolf, entirely mistaking the nature of Captain Hayward's rank and avocation. "Well, so help me —, if ever I did this on his ground afore, sir."

"Well, Master Gimlet," answered Ned Hayward, perfectly understanding what was passing in the man's mind, and willing to encourage the mistake, "I have been asked down certainly, and I suppose I must take you before Sir John Slingsby at once—unless, indeed, you like to make the matter up one way or another."

"I haven't got a single crown in the world," answered the poacher; "if you know all, you'd know that I am poor enough."

"Ay, but there are more ways than one of making matters up," rejoined Ned Hayward, in a meaning tone. "You know a little bit of business you were about last night."

The man's face turned as white as a sheet, and his limbs trembled as if he had been in the cold fit of an ague. All his strength was gone in a moment, and he was as powerless as a baby.

"Why," faltered he, at length, "you could not be sent for that affair, for there's not been time."

"No, certainly," replied the young gentleman; "but having been asked down here on other matters, I have just taken that up, and may go through with it or not, just as it suits me. Now you see, Ste," he continued, endeavouring to assume, as well as he could, somewhat of the Bow-street officer tone, and doing so quite sufficiently to effect his object with a country delinquent, "a nod, you know, is quite as good as a wink to a blind horse."

"Ay, ay, I understand, sir," answered Mr. Gimlet.

"Well, then," continued Ned Hayward, "I understand, too; and being quite sure that you are not what we call

the principal in this business, but only an accessory, I am willing to give you a chance."

"Thank'ee, sir," replied Wolf, in a meditative tone, but he said no more; and his captor, who wished him to speak voluntarily, was somewhat disappointed.

"You are mighty dull, Master Wolf," said Ned Hayward, "and therefore I must ask you, just as plain a question as the judge does when he has got the blackcap in his hand ready to put on. Have you anything to say why I should not take you at once before Sir John Slingsby?"

"Why, what the devil should I say?" rejoined the man, impatiently. "If you know me, I dare say you know the others, and if you're so cunning, you must guess very well that it was not money that we were after; so that it can't be no felony, after all."

"If it is not a felony, it is not worth my while to meddle with," answered Ned Hayward, "but there may be different opinions upon that subject; and if you like to tell me all about it, I shall be able to judge. I guessed it was not for money; but there is many a thing as bad as that. I don't ask you to speak, but you may if you like. If you don't, come along."

"Well, I'll speak all I know," answered Wolf; "that's to say, if you'll just let me get breath, for, hang me, if your grip does not half strangle me. I'll not mention names though, for I won't peach; but just to show you that there was nothing so very wrong, I'll tell you what it was all about—that's to say, if you'll let me off about these devils of fish."

"Agreed as to the fish," replied Ned Hayward, "if you tell the truth. I don't want to throttle you either, my good friend; but mark me well, if I let go my hold, and you attempt to bolt, I will knock you down, and have you before a magistrate in five minutes. Sit down there on the bank, then." And without loosening his grasp, he forced his prisoner to bend his knees and take up a position before him, from which it would not have been possible to rise without encountering a blow from a very powerful fist. When this was accomplished, he let the man's collar go, and standing directly opposite, bade him proceed.

This seemed not so easy a task as might have been imagined, at least to our friend Mr. Gimlet, who, not being a practised orator, wanted the art of saying as much as possible upon everything unimportant, and as little as possible upon everything important. He scratched his head heartily, however, and that stimulus at length enabled him to produce the following sentence.

"Well, you see, sir, it was nothing at all but a bit of love-making."

"It did not look like it," answered Ned Hayward.

"Well, it was, though," said Mr. Gimlet, in a decided tone. "The young gentleman, whom I'm talking of, wanted to get the young lady away; for you see her mother looks very sharp after her, and so he had a chaise ready, and me and another to help him; and if those two fellows had not come up just as we were about it, he'd have had her half way to Scotland by this time."

"And where is the young gentleman, as you call him, now?" asked Ned Hayward, in that sort of quiet, easy tone, in which people sometimes put questions, which, if considered seriously, would be the least likely to receive an answer.

But his companion was upon his guard. "That's neither here nor there," he replied.

"It is, I can assure you, my good friend Wolf," said the young gentleman; "for whatever you may think, this was just as much a felony as if you had taken a purse or cut a throat. Two pistols were fired, I think—the young lady is an heiress; and forcibly carrying away an heiress is as bad as a robbery; it is a sort of picking her pocket of herself. So, if you have a mind to escape a noose, you'll instantly tell me where he is."

The man thrust his hands into his pockets, and gazed at his interrogator with a sullen face, in which fear might be seen struggling with dogged resolution; but Ned Hayward, the moment after, added, as a sort of rider to his bill,—

"I dare say he is some low fellow who did it for her money."

"No, that he's not, by —!" cried the other. "He's a gentleman's son, and a devilish rich one's, too."

"Ah, ha! Mr. Wittingham's!" cried Ned Hayward; "now I understand you;" and he laughed with his peculiar clear merry laugh, which made Mr. Gimlet at first angry, and then inclined to join him. "And now, my good friend," continued Ned Hayward, laying his hand upon his companion's shoulder, "you may get up, and be off. You've made a great blunder, and mistaken me for a very respectable sort of functionary, upon whose peculiar province I have no inclination to trespass any further—I mean a thief-taker. If you will take my advice, however, neither you nor Mr. Wittingham will play such tricks again, for, if you do, you may fare worse; and you may as well leave off houcussing trout, snaring pheasants and hares, and shooting partridges on the sly, and take to some more

"legitimate occupation. You would make a very good gamekeeper, I dare say, upon the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief; and some of these days I will come up to your place upon the moor, and have a chat with you about it; I doubt not you could show me some sport with otters, or badgers, or things of that kind."

"Upon my soul and body, you're a cool hand!" cried Ste Gimlet, rising and looking at Captain Hayward, as if he did not well know whether to knock him down or not.

"I am," answered our friend Ned, with a calm smile, "quite cool, and always cool, as you'll find when you know me better. As to what has passed to-day I shall take no notice of this fish affair; and in regard to Mr. Wittingham's proceedings last night, I shall deliberate a little before I act. You'd better tell him so when you next see him, just to keep him on his good behaviour; and so good morning to you, my friend."

Thus saying, Ned Hayward turned away, and walked towards the town, without once looking to see whether his late prisoner was or was not about to hit him a blow on the head. Perhaps had he known what was passing in worthy Mr. Gimlet's mind, he might have taken some precaution; for certainly that gentleman was considerably moved; but if the good and the bad spirit had a struggle together in his breast, the good got the better at length, and he exclaimed, "No, hang it, I won't!" and with a slow and thoughtful step he walked up the stream again, towards the path which led to the moor.

Upon that path I shall leave him, and begging the reader to get upon any favourite horse he may have in the stable—hobby or not hobby—canter gaily back again to take up some friends we have left far behind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE reader may remember that we left a lady and her daughter, whom Ned Hayward afterwards discovered to be a Mrs. and Miss Clifford, standing at the door of Sir John Slingsby's house, in the heart of what was called Tarningham Park. All that Ned Hayward (or the reader either) knew of their history at the moment that he quitted them, after having assisted them to alight from their carriage, was as follows: that the elder lady had been sent for to see her elder brother in his last moments, he having been accused of having gout in the stomach, and that she and her daughter had been stopped on the king's highway by three personages, two of whom, at least, had pistols with them;

that they had been rescued by Captain Hayward himself and another gentleman; that on arriving at Tarningham House it did not look at all like the dwelling of a dying man, and that the answer of the butler to Mrs. Clifford's inquiries regarding her brother's health was, "Quite well, thank you, ma'am," delivered in the most commonplace tone in the world. •

At the precise point of time when this reply was made, Ned Hayward took his leave, remounted his horse, and rode back to Tarningham; and after he was gone Mrs. Clifford remained for at least thirty seconds somewhat bewildered with what seemed to her a very strange announcement. When she had done being bewildered, and seemed to have got a slight glimpse of the real state of the case, she turned an anxious glance to her daughter, to which Miss Clifford, who fully understood what it meant, replied at once, without requiring to have it put into words. "You had better go in, dear mamma," she said; "it will grieve poor Isabella if you do not;" and besides, it might be risking a great deal to go back at night with nobody to protect us."

Mrs. Clifford still hesitated a little, but in the meantime some by-play had been going on which decided the question. The butler had called a footman; the footman had taken a portmanteau and some smaller packages from the boot of the carriage; the name of Mrs. Clifford had been mentioned once or twice; a lady's-maid crossing the hall had seen the two ladies' faces by the light of a great lamp; and in a moment after, from a door on the opposite side of the vestibule, came forth a fair and graceful figure, looking like Hebe dressed for dinner.

"Oh, my dear aunt!" she exclaimed, running across to Mrs. Clifford and kissing her, "and you, too, my dear Mary! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure; but come in—come into the drawing-room. They will bring in all the things. There is no one there," she continued, seeing her aunt hesitate a little; "I am quite alone, and shall be for the next two hours, I dare say."

Mrs. Clifford suffered herself to be led on into a fine large old-fashioned drawing-room; and then began the explanations.

"And so, Isabella, you did not expect me to-night?" said the elder lady, addressing Hebe. "Either for jest or for mischief, some one has played us a trick. Have you got the letter, Mary?"

It was in Miss Clifford's writing-desk, however, as letters always are in some place where they cannot be found

when they are wanted; but the fact was soon explained that Mrs. Clifford, that very day about four o'clock, had received a letter, purporting to come from the housekeeper at Tarningham House, informing her that her brother, Sir John Slingsby, had been suddenly seized with gout in the stomach, and was not expected to live from hour to hour; that Miss Slingsby was too much agitated to write; but that Sir John expressed an eager desire to see his sister before he died.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the fair Isabella, "who could have done such a thing as that?" and then she laughed quietly, adding—"well, at all events I am very much obliged to them; but it was a shameful trick, notwithstanding."

"You haven't heard the whole yet, Isabella," replied Mrs. Clifford, "for we have been stopped between this and Tarningham, and should have been robbed—perhaps murdered—if two gentlemen had not come up to our rescue. Good heaven, it makes me feel quite faint to think of it." And she sat down in one of the large arm chairs, and put her hand to her head, while her cheek turned somewhat pale.

"Take a little wine, my dear aunt," cried Isabella; and, before Mrs. Clifford could stop her, she had darted out of the room.

As soon as she was alone with her daughter, the widow lady gazed round the chamber in which she sat, with a thoughtful and melancholy look. She was in the house where her early days of girlhood had passed—she was in the very room whence she had gone, in all the agitation of happy love, as a bride to the altar. She peopled the place with forms that could no longer be seen, she called up the loved and the dead, the parents who had cherished and instructed her, the fair sister who had bloomed and withered by her side. How many happy, how many a painful scene rose to the eye of memory, on that stage where they had been enacted! All the material objects were the same—the pictures, the furniture, the old oak panelling, with its carved wreaths; but where were they who moved so lately beside her in that chamber—where was all that had there been done? The grave and the past—man's tomb, and the tomb of man's actions, had received them, and in the short space of twenty years all had gone, fading away, and dissolving into air, like a smoke rising up into heaven, and spreading out thinner and thinner, till nought remains. Herself and a brother, from whom many circumstances had detached her, were all that were left of the

crowd of happy faces which remembrance called back as she sat there and gazed around. Some tears rose to her eyes, and Mary, who had been standing by, gazing at her face, and reading in it, with the quick appreciation of affection, all the emotions which brought such shadows over the loved mother's brow, knelt down beside her, and taking her hand in hers, said earnestly, "Mamma, dear mamma, I know this is painful; but pray, for my sake and Isabella's, let the shameful deceit that has been played upon us produce a good and happy result. You are here in my uncle's house; be reconciled to him fully, I beseech you. You know that he is good-humoured, notwithstanding all his faults; and I cannot but think that if those who might have led him to better things had not withdrawn from him so completely, he might now have been a different man."

Mrs. Clifford shook her head mournfully.

"My dear child," she said, "you know that it is not resentment; it was your good father who did not feel it consistent with his character and station to countenance all that takes place here."

"But for Isabella's sake," said Miss Clifford, earnestly; and before her mother could answer, the young lady of whom she spoke re-entered the room, with a servant carrying some refreshments.

"Oh, dear aunt," she said, while the wine and water and biscuits were placed upon a small table at Mrs. Clifford's elbow, "it makes me so glad to see you, and I have ordered the blue room at the south side to be got ready for you directly, and then there is the corner one for Mary, because it has a window both ways, and when she is in a gay mood she can look out over the meadows and the stream, and when she is in her high pensiveness she can gaze over the deep woods and hills. Then she is next to me, too, so that she may have merry nonsense on one side, and grave sense on the other; for I am sure you will stay a long while with us now you are here, and papa will be so glad."

"I fear it cannot be very long, my love," replied Mrs. Clifford. "In the first place, I have come, it seems, uninvited; and in the next place, you know, Isabella, that I am sometimes out of spirits, and perhaps fastidious, so that all guests do not at all times please me. Who have you here now? There seemed a large party in the dining-room."

"Oh, there are several very foolish men," answered Sir John Slingsby's daughter, laughing, "and one wise one."

"There is Mr. Dabbleworth, who was trying to prove to me all dinner-time that I am an electrical machine; and in the end, I told him I could easily believe he was one, for he certainly gave me a shock; and Sir James Vestage, who joined in, and insisted that, instead of electrical machines, men were merely improved monkeys. I told him that I perfectly agreed with him, and that I saw fresh proofs of it every day. Then up by papa was sitting old Mr. Harrington, the fox-hunter; what he was saying I do not know, for I never listen to anything he says, as it is sure either to be stupid or offensive. Then there was Charles Harrington, who lisped a good deal, and thought himself exceedingly pretty; and Mr. Wharton, the lawyer, who thought deeply and drank deeply, and said nothing but once."

"But who was your wise man, dear Isabella?" asked Mary, very willing to encourage her fair cousin in her light cheerfulness, hoping that it might win Mrs. Clifford gently from sadder thoughts.

"Oh, who but good Dr. Miles," answered Miss Slingsby, "who grumbled sadly at everybody, and even papa did not escape, I can assure you. But all these people will be gone in an hour or two, and in the meantime I shall have you all alone."

"Then there is no one staying in the house, Isabella?" said Mrs. Clifford. "I heard at Tarningham that your father expected some people from London."

"Only one, I believe," answered the fair daughter of the house, "but he has not arrived yet, and perhaps may not. He is Captain Hayward, who was ensign in papa's regiment long ago. He was a gay, thoughtless, good-humoured lad at that time, I recollect; but I do not remember much about him, except that he was a gentleman, which some others in the regiment were not. Pray, pray, do stay, dear aunt, till he is gone, for I know not what I should do with him in the house by myself. I positively must get papa to ask somebody else, or persuade the good doctor to come up and flirt with me to my heart's content, just as a diversion from the pleasures of this Captain Hayward's society."

"A very disagreeable person, I dare say," replied Mary Clifford.

But all further discussion was suddenly brought to an end by the door of the drawing-room being thrown open, and Sir John Slingsby rushing in.

Stay a moment, reader, and observe him before he advances. Honest Jack Slingsby! Roystering Sir John!

Jolly old Jack! Glorious Johnny! By all these names was he known, or had been known, by persons in different degrees of acquaintanceship with him. That round and portly form, now extending the white waistcoat and black-silk breeches, had once been slim and graceful: that face, glowing with the grape in all its different hues, from the *œil de perdrix* upon the temples and forehead to the deep purple of old port in the nose, had once been smooth and fair. That nose itself, raising itself now into mighty dominion over the rest of the face, and spreading out, heaven knows where, over the map of his countenance, like the empire of Russia in the map of Europe, was once fine and chiselled like Apollo's own. That thin white hair, flaring up into a cockatoo on the top of his head, to cover the well-confirmed baldness, was once a mass of dark curls that would not have disgraced the brow of Jove. You may see the remains of former dandyism in the smart shoe, the tight silk stocking, the well-cut blue coat; and you may imagine how much activity those limbs once possessed from the quick and buoyant step with which the capacious stomach is carried into the room. There is a jauntiness, too, in the step which would seem to imply that the portion of youthful vigour and activity which is undoubtedly gone has been parted from with regret, and that he would fain persuade himself and others that he still retains it in its full elasticity; but yet there is nothing affected about it either, and perhaps after all it is merely an effort of the mind to overcome the approach of corporeal infirmity, and to carry on the war as well as may be. Look at the good-humoured smile, too, the buoyant, boisterous, overflowing satisfaction which is radiating from every point of that rosy countenance. Who on earth could be angry with him? One might be provoked, but angry one couldn't be. It is evidently the face of one who takes the world lightly—who esteems nothing as very heavy—retains no impressions very long—enjoys the hour and its pleasures to the very utmost—and has no great consciousness of sin or shame in anything that he does. He is, in fact, a fat butterfly, who, though he may have some difficulty in fluttering from flower to flower, does his best to sip the sweets of all he finds, and not very unsuccessfully.

With that same jaunty light step, with that same good-humoured, well-satisfied smile, Sir John Slingsby advanced straight to his sister, took her in his arms, gave her a hearty kiss, and shook both her hands, exclaiming, in a round, full, juicy voice, almost as fat as himself,—

“Well, my dear Harriet, I'm very happy to see you

"This is kind, this is very kind indeed! I could hardly believe my ears when the servants told me you were here; but I left the fellows immediately, to fuddle their noses at leisure, and came to assure myself that it was a fact. And my dear Mary, too, my little saint, how are you, my dear girl?"

"We were brought here, John," replied Mrs. Clifford, "by a very shameful trick." And she proceeded to explain to him the trick which had been practised upon her.

"Gout!" exclaimed Sir John, "gout in the stomach! It would be a devilish large gout to take up his abode in my stomach, or else he'd find the house too big for him;" and he laid his hand upon his large paunch with an air of pride and satisfaction. "Gout! that does not look like gout, I think;" and he stuck out his neat foot, and trim, well-shaped ankle: "never had but one threatening of a fit in my life, and then I cured it in an afternoon—with three bottles of Champagne and a glass of brandy," he added, in a sort of loud aside to Mary, as if she would enter into the joke better than her mother. "And so really, Harriet, you would not have come if you had not thought me dying? Come, come, now, forget and forgive. Let bygones be bygones. I know I am a great fool, and do a great many very silly things; but 'pon my soul I'm very sorry for it—I am indeed. You can't think how I abominate myself sometimes, and wonder what the devil possesses me. I'll repent and reform, upon my life I will, Harriet, if you'll just stay and help me—it's being left all alone to struggle with temptation that makes me fall so often: but every ten minutes I'm saying to myself, 'What an old fool you are, Jack Slingsby!' so now you'll stay, like a dear, good girl, as you always were, and help to make my house a little respectable. Forget and forgive—forget and forgive!"

"My dear John, I have nothing to forgive," answered Mrs. Clifford. "You know very well that I would do anything in the world to promote your welfare, and always wished it, but——"

"Ay, ay, it was your husband," answered Sir John, bringing an instant cloud over his sister's face. "Well, he was a good man—an excellent man—ay, and a kind man, too, and he was devilish right, after all; I can't help saying it, though I suffer. In his station, what could he do? An archdeacon and then a dean, it was not to be expected that he should countenance rioting, and roaring, and drinking, and all that, as we used to do here; but 'pon my life, Harriet, I'll put an end to it. Now you shall

sec, I won't drink another glass to-night, and I'll send all those fellows away within half an hour, by Jove! I'll just go back and order coffee in the dining-room, and that'll be a broad hint, you know. Bella will take care of you in the meantime, and I'll be back in half an hour—high time I should reform, indeed—even that monkey begins to lecture me. I've got a capital fellow coming down to stay with me—the best fellow in the world—as gay as a lark, and as active as a squirrel; yet, somehow or other, he always kept himself right, and never played at cards, the dog, nor got drunk either, that I ever saw; yet he must have got drunk, too—every man must, sometimes; but he kept it snug if he did. Make yourselves comfortable;” and without waiting to hear his sister's further adventures on the road, Sir John Slingsby tripped out of the room again, and notwithstanding all his good resolutions, finished two-thirds of a bottle of claret while the servants were bringing in the coffee.

“Rather a more favourable account of your expected guest, Isabella, than might have been supposed,” said Mrs. Clifford, as soon as Sir John Slingsby was gone. “A young man who did not drink or play in your father's regiment must have been a rare exception; for I am sorry to say that it had a bad name in those respects long before he got it, and I believe that it did him a great deal of harm.”

“Papa is so good-humoured,” replied Miss Slingsby, “that he lets people do just what they like with him. I am sure he wishes to do all that is right.”

Mrs. Clifford was silent for a moment or two, and then turned the conversation; but in the house of her brother she was rather like a traveller, who, riding through a country, finds himself suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of what they call in Scotland a shaking moss; whichever path she took, the ground seemed to be giving way under her. She spoke of the old park and the fine trees, and to her dismay she heard that Sir John had ordered three hundred magnificent oaks to be cut down and sold. She spoke of a sort of model farm which had been her father's pride, and, after a moment or two of silence, Isabella thought it better to prevent her coming upon the same subject with her father, by telling her that Sir John, not being fond of farming, had disposed of it some three months before to Mr. Wharton, the solicitor.

“He could not find a tenant easily for it,” she continued, “and it annoyed him to have it unoccupied, so he was per-

"suaded to sell it, intending to invest the money in land adjoining the rest of the property."

"I hope Mr. Wharton gave him a fair price for it?" said Mrs. Clifford.

"I really don't know," answered her niece; "I dislike that man very much."

"And so do I," said Mary Clifford.

"And so do I," added her mother, thoughtfully.

Mr. Wharton had evidently not established himself in the favour of the ladies, and, as ladies are always right, he must have been a very bad man indeed.

To vary the pleasures of such a conversation, Miss Slingsby soon after ordered tea, trusting that her father would return before it was over. Sir John Slingsby's half hour, however, extended itself to an hour and a half; but then an immense deal of loud laughing and talking, moving of feet, seeking for hats and coats, and ultimately rolling of wheels, and trotting of horses, was heard in the drawing-room, and the baronet himself again appeared, as full of fun and good-humour as ever. He tried, indeed, somewhat to lower the tone of his gaiety, to suit his sister's more rigid notions; but, although he was not in the least tipsy—and, indeed, it was a question which might have puzzled Babbage's calculating machine to resolve what quantity of any given kind of wine would have affected his brain to the point of inebriety—yet the potations in which he had indulged had certainly spread a genial warmth through his bosom, which kept his spirits at a pitch considerably higher than harmonised very well with Mrs. Clifford's feelings.

At the end of about half an hour's conversation, then, complaining of fatigue, she retired to bed, and was followed by her niece and her daughter, after the former, at her father's desire, had sung him a song to make him sleep comfortably. Sir John then stretched his legs upon a chair to meditate for a minute or two over the unexpected event of his sister's arrival. But the process of meditation was not one that he was at all accustomed to, and consequently he did not perform it with great ease and dexterity. After he had tried it for about thirty seconds, his head nodded, and then looking up, he said, "Ah!" and then attempted it again. Fifteen seconds were enough this time; but his head, finding that it had disturbed itself by its rapid declension on the former occasion, now sank gradually on his shoulder, and thence found its way slowly round to his breast. Deep breathing succeeded for about a quarter of

an hour, and then an awful snore, loud enough to rouse the worthy baronet by his own trumpet. Up he started, and, getting unsteadily upon his legs, rubbed his eyes, and muttered to himself, "Time to go to bed." Such was the conclusion of his meditation, and the logical result of the process in which he had been engaged.

The next morning, however, at the hour of half-past nine, found Sir John in the breakfast-room, as fresh, as rosy, and as gay as ever. If wine had no effect upon his intellect at night, it had none upon his health and comfort in the morning; the blushing banner which he bore in his countenance was the only indication of the deeds that he achieved: and kissing the ladies all round, he sat down to the breakfast-table, and spent an hour with them in very agreeable chat. He was by no means ill-informed, not without natural taste, a very fair theoretical judgment, which was lamentably seldom brought into practice, and he could discourse of many things, when he liked it, in as gentlemanlike and reasonable a manner as any man living; while his cheerful good-humour shed a sunshine around, that, in its sparkling warmth, made men forget his faults and over-estimate his good qualities. He had a particular tact, too, of palliating errors which he had committed, sometimes by acknowledging them frankly, and lamenting the infatuation that produced them, sometimes by finding out excellent good reasons for doing things which had a great deal better been left undone. Mary and Isabella had been walking in the park before breakfast, talking of all those things which young ladies find to converse about when they have not met for some time; and Sir John, at once aware that his niece's eye must have marked the destruction going on amongst the old trees, asked her in the most deliberate tone in the world, if she had seen the improvements he was making.

Mary Clifford replied "No," and looked at her cousin as if for explanation; and then Sir John exclaimed,—

"Bless my soul, did you not see the alley I am cutting? It will make the most beautiful vista in the world. First you will go round from the house by the back of the wood, slowly mounting the hill, by what we call the Broad Walk, and then when you have reached the top, you will have a clear view down through a sort of glade, with the old trees on your right and left hand, over the clumps of young firs in the bottom, catching the stream here and there, and having the park wall quite concealed, till the eye, passing over the meadows, just rests upon Tarningham Church, and then running on, gets a view of your own place, Hinton,

‘looking like a white speck on the side of the hill, and the prospect is closed by the high grounds beyond. My dear Mary, it is the greatest improvement that ever was made—we will go and see it.’

Now the real truth was, that Sir John Slingsby, some four or five months before, had very much wanted three thousand pounds, and he had determined to convert a certain number of his trees into bank-notes; but being a man of very good taste, as I have said, he had arranged the cutting so as to damage his park scenery as little as possible. Nevertheless, in all he said to Mary Clifford, strange as the assertion may seem, he was perfectly sincere; for he was one of those men who always begin by deceiving themselves, and, having done that, can hardly be said to deceive others. It is a sort of infectious disease they have, that is all, and they communicate it after having got it themselves. Before he had cut a single tree, he had perfectly persuaded himself that to do so would effect the greatest improvement in the world; and he was quite proud of having beautified his park, and at the same time obtained three thousand pounds of ready money.

Doubtless, had the conversation turned that way, he would have found as good an excuse, as valid a reason, as legitimate a motive, for selling the model farm; but that not being the case, they went on talking of different subjects, till suddenly the door opened, the butler, who was nearly as fat as his master, advanced three steps in a solemn manner, and announced “Captain Hayward.”

Sir John instantly started up, and the three ladies raised their eyes simultaneously, partly with that peculiar sort of curiosity which people feel when they look into the den of some rare wild beast, and partly with that degree of interest which we all take in the outward form and configuration of one of our own species, upon whom depends a certain portion of the pleasure or pain, amusement or dullness, of even a few hours. The next moment our friend Ned Hayward was in the room. He was well-dressed and well-looking, as I have already described him in his riding costume. Gentleman was in every line and every movement, and his frank, pleasant smile, his clear, open countenance were very engaging even at the first sight. Sir John shook him warmly by the hand, and although the baronet’s countenance had so burgeoned and blossomed since he last saw him, that the young gentleman had some difficulty in recognising his former colonel, yet Ned Hayward returned his grasp with equal cordiality, and then looked round, as his host led him up towards Miss Slingsby, and re-intro-

duced them to each other. Great was the surprise of both the baronet and his daughter, to see Mrs. Clifford rise, and with a warm smile extend her hand to their new guest, and even Mary Clifford follow her mother's example, and welcome, as if he were an old friend, the very person with whose name they had seemed unacquainted the night before.

"Ah, ha, Ned!" cried Sir John; "how is this, boy? Have you been poaching upon my preserves without my knowing it? 'Pon my life, Harriet, you have kept your acquaintance with my little ensign quite snug and secret."

"It is an acquaintance of a very short date, John," replied Mrs. Clifford; "but one which has been of inestimable service to me already."

And she proceeded in a very few words to explain to her brother the debt of gratitude she owed to Captain Hayward for his interference the night before, and for the courtesy he had shown in escorting and protecting her to the doors of that very house.

Sir John immediately seized his guest by the lappels of the coat, exclaiming,—

"And why the devil didn't you come in, you dog? What, Ned Hayward at my gates, an expected guest, and not come in! I can tell you, we should have given you a warm reception, fined you a couple of bottles for being late at dinner, and sent you to bed roaring drunk."

Ned Hayward gave a gay glance round at the ladies, as if inquiring whether they thought these were great inducements; he answered, however,—

"Strange to say, I did not know it was your house, Sir John."

And now, having placed our friend Ned Hayward comfortably between two excessively pretty girls of very different styles of beauty, and very different kinds of mind, I shall leave fate to settle his destiny, and turn to another scene which had preceded his arrival at Tarningham House.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN never sees above half of anything, never knows above half of anything, never understands above half of anything; and upon this half sight, half knowledge, and half understanding, he acts, supplying the deficiency of his information by a guess at the rest, in which there is more than an equal chance that he is wrong instead of right. That is the moral of this chapter.

After Ned Hayward's interview with Stephen Gimlet, alias Wolf, our friend turned his steps back towards Tarningham, and arrived at the White Hart by eight o'clock. About three quarters of an hour had shaved him, dressed him, and brushed his hair, and down he went to the little parlour in which he had passed the preceding evening, just in time to find Mr. Beauchamp beginning his breakfast. Although the latter gentleman shook his companion cordially by the hand, and seemed to look upon his presence in the parlour as a matter of course, Ned Hayward thought fit to apologize for his intrusion, adding, "I shall not maroon myself upon you very long, for soon after breakfast I shall decamp to Sir John Slingsby's."

"I am sorry, I assure you, to lose the pleasure of your society so soon," replied Beauchamp; and then added, addressing the maid, who had just brought in some broiled ham, "you had better bring some more cups and saucers, my good girl."

"And some more ham, and also a cold fowl," added Ned Hayward. "I have the appetite of an ogre, and if you do not make haste, I must have a bit out of your rosy cheek, my dear, just to stay my stomach."

"La, sir!" cried the maid, with a coquettish little titter; but she ran away to get what was wanted, as if she were really afraid of the consequences of Ned Hayward's appetite; and as soon as she was gone, he said,—

"I have got news for you, Beauchamp; but I will wait till the room is clear before I give it. I have been up and out, over the hills and far away, this morning; so I have well earned my breakfast."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion, with a look of surprise; "really you are an active general; but you should have given your fellow soldiers information of your movements, and we might have combined operations."

"There was no time to be lost," answered Hayward.

But at that moment the maid returned with the cold fowl; the ham was still in the rear, and it was not till breakfast was half over that the young officer could tell his tale. "When he had got as far with it as the first explanations of Mr. Gimlet, Beauchamp exclaimed eagerly, "And what did it turn out to be?"

"Nothing, after all, but a love affair," answered Ned.

"Now, my dear Beauchamp, I have as much compassion for all lovers as an old match-making dowager; and therefore I think it will be better to let this matter drop quietly."

"Oh, certainly," answered his new friend, "I am quite under-hearted in such matters as yourself; but are you

quite sure of the fact? for this seems to me to have been a very odd way of making love."

"It was so, assuredly," replied Hayward, "but nevertheless, the tale is true. The fact is, the young lady is an heiress, the mother strict—most likely the latter looks for some high match for her daughter, and will not hear of the youth's addresses. He falls into despair, and, with a Roman courage, resolves to carry off a bride. Unfortunately for his purpose, we come up, and the rape of the Sabines is prevented; but, 'pon my honour, I admire the fellow for his spirit. There is something chivalrous—nay, more—feudal about it. He must fancy himself some old baron who had a right prescriptive to run away with every man's daughter that suited him; and, on my life, my dear Beauchamp, I can go on no further in attempting to punish him for a deed whose hot and proof spirit shames this milk-and-water age. Oh, the times of carrying off heiresses, of robbing in cocked hats and full-bottomed wigs, of pink-ing one's adversary under the fifth rib in Leicester Fields, with gentlemen in high shoes and gold lace for seconds, and chairmen for spectators, when will they come again? Gone, gone for ever, my dear Beauchamp, into the same box as our grandmother's brocade-gown, and with them the last spark of the spirit of chivalry has expired."

"Very true," answered Beauchamp, smiling at his companion's tirade, "there was certainly an adventurous turn about those days which saved them from dulness; but yet there was a primness about them which was curious, a formality mingling with their wildest excesses, a prudery with their licentiousness, which can only be attributed to the cut of their clothes. There is some mysterious link between them, depend upon it, Hayward; and whether it be that the clothes affect the man, or the man the clothes, it is not for me to say; but the grand internal harmony of nature will not be violated, and the spirit of the age is represented in the coats, waistcoats, and breeches of the people of the period much better than in all the stupid books written from time to time to display it.

This was the first sentence that Ned Hayward had ever heard his companion speak in a jocular tone, but Beauchamp immediately went on, in a graver manner, to say, "Yet, after all, I do not see how we can drop this matter entirely. Far be it from me, of all men on earth, to persecute another; but yet, having already given information of this attempt at robbery, as it seemed to us, and tendered our evidence on oath, we cannot well draw back. A gross offence has indubitably been committed, not only in

the attack upon these two ladies, but also in the very violent and murderous resistance which was made when we arrived to their rescue; and this young gentleman should have a warning, at least."

"To be sure—to be sure," answered Ned Hayward; "I have got the pistol ball singing in my ear now, and I am quite willing to give him a fright, and old Wittingham too. The latter I will, please Heaven, torment out of the remnant of seven senses that he has left: for a more pompous, vulgar old blockhead I never saw; and therefore I should propose at once—that is to say, as soon as I have done this cup of coffee—you have finished, I see—to go to good Mr. Wittingham's, and belabour him with our small wits, till he is nearly like the man who was scourged to death with rushes."

"Nay, nothing quite so sanguinary as that, I trust," said Beauchamp; "but I will accompany you willingly, and see fair play between you and the magistrate."

According to this arrangement, as soon as breakfast was over, and Ned Hayward had given some directions with regard to preparing his horse, his baggage, and a conveyance for the latter, the two gentlemen sallied forth to the magistrate's room in the town, where they found Mr. Wittingham seated with a clerk, the inferior attorney of the place. The latter was a man well fitted to prompt an ignorant and self-conceited magistrate in a matter of difficulty, if its importance were not very great, and he knew all the particulars. He was a little, fat, compact man—in form, feature, and expression very like a Chinese pig. Nevertheless, he was a very good sort of little man.

On the present occasion, indeed, he was ignorant of the facts of the case about to be brought before Mr. Wittingham—the latter gentleman having considered with great solicitude whether he should make him acquainted with all that had occurred, and seek his advice and co-operation. But Mr. Wittingham was cautious, exceedingly cautious, as I have already shown, when no strong passion caused him to act in a decided manner upon the spur of the moment. "His natural impulse might, indeed, be vehement, and he frequently had to repeat to himself that sage adage, 'The least said is soonest mended,' before he could get himself to refrain from saying a word to the clerk, Mr. Bacon, except that two men had come to him the night before with a cock-and-a-bull story about a highway robbery, of which he did not believe a word, and they were to come again that morning, when he should sift it thoroughly. Now it is wonderful how the very least bits of art will

frequently betray the artist. Mr. Wittingham merely said, "Two men," which led his clerk, Mr. Bacon, to suppose that he had never seen either of the two men before; but when Mr. Beauchamp appeared, in company with Ned Hayward, and the clerk recollected that the magistrate had very frequently wondered, in his presence, who Mr. Beauchamp could be, and had directed him to make every sort of inquiry, he naturally said to himself, "Ha, ha, Wittingham has got something that he wishes to conceal; if not, why didn't he say at once that Mr. Beauchamp was one of the two? There's a screw loose somewhere—that's clear."

On Ned Hayward, the clerk's small eyes fixed with a keen, inquisitive, and marvelling glance, as, with his gay dashing air, half military, half sporting, firm and yet light, measured and yet easy, he advanced into the room and approached the table.

"Well, Mr. Witherington," said Ned Hayward, perfectly aware that nothing so much provokes a pompous man as mistaking his name, "here we are according to appointment; and doubtless you are ready to take our depositions, Mr. Witherington."

"Wittingham, sir," said the magistrate, impressively, laying a strong emphasis on each syllable, "I beg you'll give me my own name, and nobody else's."

"Ay, ay; Wittington," said Ned Hayward, with the utmost composure, "I forgot; I knew it was some absurd name in an old ballad or story, and confounded you, somehow or other, with the man in 'Chevy Chase,' who

'When his legs were smitten off,
He fought upon his stumps.'

But I remember now, you're the son of the Lord Mayor of London, the cat-man."

"No, sir—no," exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, whose face had turned purple with rage: "I am not his son, and you must be a fool to think so, for he died two hundred years ago."

"Oh, I know nothing of history," said Ned Hayward, laughing; "and besides, I dare say it's all a fable."

"This gentleman's name is Wittingham, sir," said the clerk, "W-I-T wit, T-I-N-G ting, H-A-M ham, Wittingham."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, sir," said the young gentleman, "I shan't forget it now. 'Littera scripta manet,' Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name is Bacon, sir," said the clerk, with a grunt.

"Ah, very well—very well," replied Ned Hayward,

- "now to business. Wittingham, Bacon, and Co. ; I shan't forget that ; an excellent good firm, especially when the junior partner is cut into rashers and well roasted. We are here, sir, to tender information upon oath, when it can no longer be of any avail, which we tendered last night, when it might have been of avail, in regard to an attempt at highway robbery, committed yesterday evening upon the persons of two ladies in this neighbourhood—namely, Mrs. Clifford and her daughter."

"Tendered last night, sir !" exclaimed the clerk, in spite of a tremendous nudge from Mr. Wittingham—"pray whom did you tender it to?"

"To the right reverend gentleman on the bench," said Ned Hayward, with a profound bow to the worthy magistrate ; and then, looking at him full in the face with a significant smile, the young gentleman added, "he refused to take our depositions on secret motives or information of his own, which, as it was kept in the profound depth of his mind, I will not attempt to penetrate."

Mr. Wittingham was in a state of most distressing perplexity. His fears were a powder magazine, Ned Hayward's smile was a spark, and there was a terrible explosion in his chest, which had nearly blown the window out.

"I—I—you see, Bacon," he whispered to the clerk, "I thought it was all nonsense, I was sure it was all nonsense—you may see by the fellow's manner that it is so. Who'd attend to such stuff?"

"I don't know, sir," said the clerk ; "magistrates are bound to take informations of felonies tendered on oath ; but we shall soon see who he is ; we'll swear him ;" and, taking up a paper from the table, he began to write, lifting up his head, after a moment, and inquiring, "What is your name and profession?"

"My name is Edward Hayward," answered our friend, "late captain in His Majesty's 40th regiment, now unattached."

Mr. Wittingham's face grew blanker and blanker. Yamen's own could not have looked a more russety brown. He did not know how to interfere with the clerk, or how to proceed himself ; but at length, after sundry hums and haws, he said, "I think we had better hear the whole story first, and then take down the deposition, if we should find it necessary. If Mrs. Clifford was robbed, or attempted to be robbed, why doesn't Mrs. Clifford come to give information herself? I see no reason why we should suffer such accounts to be gone into by deputy. The of-

fence was against Mrs. Clifford, and we shall always be ready to balance."

"The offence was against the law of the land, sir," said Mr. Beauchamp, stepping forward, "and we who witnessed the offence, and prevented it from being carried further, now come forward to demand that interference of justice which cannot be refused without great danger to those who deny it."

"Well, well," said Mr. Wittingham, "I am not going to deny it. Let us hear your story, and as you are one of the informers, be so good as to favour us with your name, profession, etc."

"My name, sir, is Beauchamp," replied the gentleman he addressed; "profession, I am sorry to say, I have none."

"Ah," said the magistrate, drily; but the clerk whispered sharply in his ear, "He has two thousand pounds in the bank, paid in the day before yesterday. Jenkins told me last night at the Free and Easy, so it's all a mistake about his being—you know what."

The clerk had a reverence for gentlemen who had two thousand pounds at one time in a country bank—much greater reverence than for captains of infantry unattached; and consequently he proceeded to take Mr. Beauchamp's deposition first, with all due respect, notwithstanding everything Mr. Wittingham could do to embarrass his course of operations. Then came Ned Hayward's turn, but our good friend thought fit to be more serious when an oath had been administered, and delivered his evidence with gravity and propriety. As soon, however, as Mr. Wittingham began to meddle with the matter again, and to treat the affair as one of little consequence, and not deserving much consideration, the spirit of malicious fun seized upon Ned once more, and he said with a mysterious air, "Sir, I beg you will give this your most serious attention, for you cannot yet tell what parties may be implicated. In giving our testimony, of course we speak to facts alone. I have strictly confined myself to what I saw, and have not even mentioned one circumstance of which I have even a shade of doubt; but without interfering with your business, Mr. Skittington—for I never take another man's trade upon me—yet I shall certainly feel myself called upon to investigate quietly, and by all lawful means, the whole particulars of this business. That a felony has been committed there can be no doubt; two pistols were fired at me with intent to take my life, or do me some grievous bodily harm; one ball went through my hair, and the matter is a very grave one, which may probably bring some respectable persons

into a noose under a gallows. Look to it, look to it, Mr. Whittington! for I shall certainly look to it myself."

"Well, sir, well—do anything you please," said the magistrate. "I will do my duty without being tutored by you. I consider your conduct very disrespectful and—"

But ere he could finish the sentence the door of the justice-room opened, and a young man entered, dressed in the garb of a gentleman. Mr. Whittingham's face turned as pale as death; and Ned Hayward fixed his eyes for an instant—a single instant—upon the countenance of the new-comer. It was by no means a prepossessing one, and the expression was not improved by a black handkerchief being tied over one eye, and hiding part of the nose and cheek. The young officer instantly withdrew his eyes, and fixed them sternly on the ground. "This is too impudent," he thought; and there was a momentary hesitation in his mind as to whether he should not at once point out the intruder as the chief offender in the acts lately under discussion. Good-nature, however, prevailed, and while Henry Whittingham advanced straight to his father's side, and with a look of bold fierceness whispered a word in his ear, Ned Hayward turned to the door, saying, "Come, Beauchamp, our business here is over, and I must go up to Sir John Slingsby's."

Beauchamp followed him, after giving a sharp glance at Henry Whittingham, and at the door of the house they saw a horse standing which seemed to have been ridden hard.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BEAUCHAMP was sitting alone in the little room of the inn about four hours after Ned Hayward had left him. The day had been very warm for the season of the year, and, though he had taken his walk as usual in the most shady and pensive places he could discover, he had found it oppressive, and had returned sooner than he ordinarily did. Mr. Groomber, worthy Mr. Groomber, the landlord of the White Hart, had perceived his return through the glass-doors of the bar, and had rolled in to tell him, as a piece of news, that the post-boy who had driven Mrs. and Miss Clifford had been, as he termed it, "had up," before Mr. Whittingham and examined, but had been speedily dismissed, he having sworn most valorously that he could not identify any of the persons concerned in stopping the chaise on the preceding night.

Mr. Beauchamp merely replied, "I thought so," and

taking up a book, gave quiet intimation that he wished to be alone. As soon as the host had retired, however, he suffered the open volume to drop upon his knee, and gave himself up to thought, apparently of not the most cheerful kind, for the broad open brow became somewhat contracted, the fine dark eyes fixed upon one particular spot on the floor, the lip assumed a melancholy, even a cynical expression, and without moving limb or feature, he remained for at least a quarter of an hour in meditation most profound.

For my own part, I do not see what business men have to think at all. If it be of the past, can they recall it? If it be of the future, can they govern it? No, no; and the present is for action, not for meditation. It was very foolish of Mr. Beauchamp to think, but yet he did so, and profoundly. But of what were his thoughts? I cannot tell. Some I know, some I do not know; or rather, like an intercepted letter, the actual course of his meditation was plain enough, written in clear and forcible lines, but the wide world of circumstances to which it referred, its relations with his fate, with his past history, with his present condition, with his future prospects, were all in darkness.

"It is in vain," he said to himself, "all in vain! Peace, happiness, tranquillity—where do they dwell? Are they the mere phantasms of man's ever-building imaginations? creations of fancy, to satisfy the craving need of the soul? And yet some men can obtain them. This very Captain Hayward, he seems at least as well contented, as well satisfied with himself, the world, and all the world gives, as it is possible to conceive. But it is not so—it cannot be so. There is a black spot somewhere, I am sure,—some bitter memory, some disappointed hope, some aspiration for the something ever desired. He owned he dared not venture to love—is not that to be in a continued chain, to bear a fetter about one? and yet he seemed contented with such a fate. It is the regulation of our desires that makes us happy, the bounding them to our means—aye, with those who have no already existing cause for sorrow, the cup of our fate is ever open for each passing hand to drop a poison into it, and once there, it pervades the whole—the whole? by every drop down to the very dregs, turning the sweetness and the spirit of the wine of life to bitterness and death. What is it that I want that can make existence pleasant? Wealth, health, a mind carefully trained and furnished with the keys to every door of mental enjoyment—with love for my fellow-creatures, good-will to all men, I have all—surely all; but, alas! I have memory, too, and

like the pillar of the cloud, it sometimes follows me, darkening the past, sometimes goes before me, obscuring the future. Yet this is very weak. An effort of the mind—the mind I have vainly thought so strong—should surely suffice to cast off the load. I have tried occupation, calm enjoyments, fair scenes, tranquil pleasures, peaceful amusements. Perhaps in a more fiery and eager course, in active, energetic pursuits, in passions that absorb all the feelings, and wrap the soul in their own mantle, I may find forgetfulness. In all that I have hitherto done, there have been long intervals, open gates for bitter memory to enter, and the very nature of my chosen objects has invited her. Oh, yes, there must be such a thing as happiness! that girl's fair, joyous face, her smile teeming with radiance, told me so. But I will not think of her. She is too bright, and fair, and happy, to risk her peace on so hazardous a speculation as mine. I will go away from this place: it has given my mind some little repose, and I could have made a friend of that light, good-humoured Hayward, if he would have let me—but he has left me, too—all things leave me, I think. Well, he is gone, and I will go too—'tis not worth while lingering longer."

At this point of his meditations, some horses passed the window, and shadows darkened the room; but Beauchamp took no notice, till he heard a voice which had become somewhat familiar to him during the last eighteen hours, exclaiming, "Ostler, ostler!" and in a moment after Ned Hayward was in the room again, but not alone. He was followed by the portly figure of Sir John Slingsby, dressed in riding costume, and though somewhat dusty, and certainly very round and heavy, yet bearing that undefinable and almost ineffaceable look of a gentleman which not even oddities and excesses had been able to wipe out.

Ned Hayward's words were few and soon spoken: "Mr. Beauchamp, Sir John Slingsby; Sir John, Mr. Beauchamp," were all he said, but the old baronet soon took up the conversation, shaking his new acquaintance warmly by the hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Beauchamp—very glad to see you. I find my family are under a great obligation to you—that is to say, my sister Harriet, Mrs. Clifford. Devilish impudent thing, by Jove, for those fellows to attack a carriage at that time of the evening; and very lucky you happened to be there, for my friend Ned Hayward here, though he has a notion of tactics—haven't you, Ned?—and is a stout fellow, could hardly have managed three of them."

"I look upon myself as very fortunate, Sir John," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "in having taken my evening walk in that direction; but, at the same time, it is but fair to acknowledge that my share in the rescue of your sister and her daughter was but small. I only kept one man in play, while Captain Hayward had to contend with two."

"All the same—all the same, my dear sir," said the baronet; "the reserve shares all the glory of a battle, even if it does not pull a trigger. The ladies, however, are exceedingly obliged to you—very good girls, both of them—not that they have commissioned me to express their thanks, far from it, for they are particularly anxious to do so themselves, if you will give them the opportunity; and therefore they have begged me to ask if you would favour us by your company at dinner to-day, and to say that they will be devilish sorry if any previous engagement should prevent you, though they calculate upon to-morrow, if not to-day."

"I am quite an anchorite here, Sir John," answered Mr. Beauchamp, with a grave smile; but before he could finish his sentence, the old baronet, thinking it was the commencement of an excuse, hastened to stop it, saying,—

"Quite a quiet dinner, I assure you—all as grave and proper as possible; no drinking, no laughing, no fun—all upon our good behaviour. There will be nobody but you, Ned Hayward, I, and the doctor there; Harriet, Mary, and my girl—who, by the way, says she knows you—has seen you more than once at the good doctor's—Doctor Miles's."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Slingsby," said Beauchamp. "I was only about to answer you just now, Sir John, that I am quite an anchorite here, and therefore not likely to have many invitations to dinner. As I have not much cultivated the people of the place, they have not much cultivated me; and I believe they look upon me as a somewhat suspicious character, especially our friend Mr. Wittingham, who, I find, has been very curious in his inquiries as to whether I pay my bills, and where I go to when I walk out."

"Wittingham's an old fool!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby; "and, like all other old fools, he thinks himself the wisest man in the world. I wonder what the lord-lieutenant could be dreaming of when he put him in the commission of the peace—a man no more fit for it than my horsewhip. I'll pay him for it all—I'll pay him—ask him to dinner—make him beastly drunk, and lodge him for the night in a horse-trough."

"I hope not this evening, Sir John," said Beauchamp, with a smile.

"Oh, dear, no," replied the baronet, with a look of rueful fear; "all very prim to-night—all as grave as judges—quite proper and discreet while my sister Harriet is with us—an archdeacon's widow, you know—a dean's, after all—though he was only dean for a couple of months—a very good man, indeed, but exceedingly proper—terribly proper: the very sound of a cork frightened him out of his wits. I do believe he fancied that Port and Madeira are sent over in decanters, and claret in jugs with handles. However, you'll come, that's settled: half-past five, old-fashioned hours, gives plenty of time after dinner. But now that's no use," added the baronet, with a sigh; "we might as well dine at seven now—no use of a long evening. However, the girls will give us a song, or music of some kind, and perhaps we can make up a rubber at long whist, which will make us sleep as sound as dormice. No sin in that—no, Ned?"

"None in the world, Sir John," answered Ned Hayward, "but a great deal of dulness. I never could make out in my life how men, with their wits about them, could spend hours throwing bits of painted pasteboard in a particular order, for shillings and sixpences."

"Just as reasonable as standing up for hours to be shot at for shillings and sixpences," answered Sir John Slingsby; "and both you and I have played at that, you dog. Everything is folly if you take it in the abstract—love, war, wine, ambition; and depend upon it, Ned, the lightest follies are the best—isn't it so, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"There is indeed some truth in what you say, Sir John," replied Beauchamp, with a thoughtful smile; "and I believe amusing follies are better than serious ones—at least, I begin to think so now."

"To be sure—to be sure," answered Sir John Slingsby; "man was made for fun, and not for sadness. It's a very nice world if people would let it be so. Oh, we'll show you some sport, Mr. Beauchamp, before we have done with you; but to-day, you know, we'll all be very proper—very good boys indeed—and then when the cats away the mice will play. Ha! ha! ha! At half-past five you know, and in the meantime, Ned and I will ride off and abuse old Wittingham. I'll give him a pretty lecture."

Good Sir John was disappointed, however; his horses, his groom, and his bulky person, had all been seen from the windows of Mr. Wittingham's house as he rode into the town with Ned Hayward, and, as a matter of course, Mr.

Wittingham was over the hills and far away before the visit of Mr. Beauchamp was concluded.

When Sir John and Ned Hayward left him, Beauchamp remained for some minutes with a smile upon his countenance—a meditative—nay, a melancholy smile.

“So fleet our resolutions!” he said to himself, “so fade away our schemes and purposes! Who can say in this life what he will do and what he will not do the next day—nay, the next minute? Which is the happiest, after all, the man who struggles with fate and circumstance, and strives to perform the impracticable task of ruling them, or he who, like a light thing upon the waters, suffers himself to be carried easily down the current, whirling round with every eddy, resting quietly in the still pool, or dashing gaily down the rapids? Heaven knows, but at all events fate has shown herself so resolute to take my affairs into her own hands, that I will not try to resist her. I will indulge every whim, and leave fortune to settle the result. I may as well purchase that property: it is as good an investment as any other, I dare say, and if not, it does not much signify, I will write to my agent to transmit the money to-day.”

With this resolution he sat down, and had soon dispatched a few lines, which he carried to the post himself: then strolled out of the town for an hour, and then returned to dress, ordering a post-chaise for Tarningham Park.

How different are the sensations with which one goes out to dinner at different times—ay, even when it is to the house of a new acquaintance, where we have little means of judging previously whether our day will be pleasant or unpleasant, joyous or sad! As there must be more than one party to each compact, and as the agent and its object act and react upon each other, so the qualities of each have their share in the effect upon either, and the mood of the visitor has at least as much to do with the impression that he receives as the mood of the host. Wonderfully trite!—is it not, reader? It has been said a thousand times before, but it will not do you the least harm to have it repeated, especially as I wish you clearly to understand the mood in which Mr. Beauchamp went, for the first time, to the house of Sir John Slingsby. It was, then, in that kind of indifferent mood of which I have shown some indications, by describing what was passing in his mind after the baronet and Ned Hayward left him. There are, however, various sorts of indifferent moods: there is the gay indifference, which is very commonly called devil-me-carishness; then there is the im-

pertinent indifference, with a dash of persiflage in it, just to take off the chill—as men put brandy into soda-water—which very empty and conceited men assume to give them an air of that superiority to which they are entitled by no mental quality. Then there is the indifference of despair and the indifference of satiety. But none of these was the exact sort of indifference which Mr. Beauchamp felt, or thought he felt. It was a grave indifference, springing from a sort of morbid conviction that the happiness or unhappiness of man is not at all in his own hands, or that if it be at all so, it is only at his outset in life, and that the very first step so affects the whole course of after events, as to place the control over them totally beyond his own power.

As he passed the rectory, with its smooth, well-mown lawn and green gates, Beauchamp put his head to the carriage-window and looked out. He expected to see, perhaps, a neat one-horse chaise, and a sleek, well-fed beast to draw it; but there was nothing of the kind there, and he remarked the traces of a pair of wheels from the door on the road before him. Half a mile further were the gates of Sir John Slingsby's park. It cannot be said that they were in very good order, the iron-work wanted painting sadly, one or two of the bars had got a sad twist, the columns of stone-work to which they were fixed needed pointing, if not more solid repairs. The lodge had all the shutters up, and the post-boy had to get down and open the gates.

Beauchamp sighed, not because he took any great interest in the place or the people it contained, but because the aspect of desolation—of the decay of man's works—especially from neglect, is well worth a sigh. The drive through the park, however, was delightful. Old trees were all around, glorious old trees, those ever-growing monuments of the past, those silent leafy chroniclers of ages gone. Who planted them, who nourished, who protected them? what times have they seen, what deeds have they witnessed, what storms have passed over them, what sunshine have they drunk, what sorrows and what joys have visited the generations of man, since first they sprang up from the small seed till now, when they stretch out their giant arms to shelter the remote posterity of those whom they have seen flourish and pass away? Who can wander among old trees, and not ask such questions—ay, and a thousand more?

The sight was pleasant to Mr. Beauchamp; it had a serious yet pleasing effect upon his mind, and when the chaise drew up at the door of Tarningham House, he felt

more disposed than before to enjoy the society within, whatever it might be.

The outer door was opened, the fat butler threw back pompously the two glass doors within, a couple of round footmen, whose lineaments were full of ale, flanked the hall on either side, and thus Mr. Beauchamp was marshalled to the drawing-room, which he entered with his calm and dignified air, not in the slightest degree agitated, although he was well aware that two very pretty faces were most likely looking for his arrival.

Sir John Slingsby, in the blue coat, the white waistcoat, the black breeches and stockings, with the rubicund countenance and white hair, advanced at once to receive him, and presented him to Mrs. Clifford and her daughter.

"This young lady you already know, Mr. Beauchamp," he said, pointing to his daughter, "so I shan't introduce you here."

But that gentleman shook hands with Miss Slingsby first, proving that their acquaintance, however short, had made some steps towards friendship.

Isabella was a little fluttered in her manner, why, she scarcely knew herself; and the colour grew deeper in her cheek, and her smile wavered, as if she would fain have seemed not too well pleased. All this, however, did not at all take from her beauty; for as a fair scene is never lovelier than when the shadows of drifting clouds are passing over it, so a pretty face is never prettier than under the influence of slight emotions.

Miss Slingsby and Mary Clifford were standing both together, so that Beauchamp had both those sweet faces before him at once. Isabella was as fair as a lily, with eyes of a deep blue, and warm brown hair, neither light nor dark, clustering richly round her brow and cheek in wilful curls that would have their own way. Mary Clifford was darker in complexion, with the hair braided on her brow; there was deep but gentle thought in her dark eyes, and though the short chiselled upper lip could at times bear a joyous smile enough, yet the general expression was grave, though not melancholy.

Beauchamp was a serious man, of a calm, quiet temper, somewhat saddened by various events which had befallen him, but which of those two faces, reader, think you he admired the most? The gay one, to be sure, the one the least like himself. So it is wisely ordained by nature, and it is the force of circumstances alone that ever makes us choose a being similar to ourselves to be our companion through existence. Two tones, exactly the same, even

upon different instruments, produce unison, not harmony ; and so it is throughout all nature.

After a few words to Isabella, Mr. Beauchamp turned again to Mrs. Clifford, who at once spoke of their adventure of the night before, and thanked him for his kind assistance. Beauchamp said all that courtesy required, and said it gracefully and well. He expressed the pleasure that he felt to see that neither of the ladies had suffered from the fear or agitation they had undergone, and expressed great satisfaction at having been near the spot at the moment the attack was made.

While they were speaking, Sir John Slingsby had twice taken out his watch—it was a large one, hanging by a thick gold chain, and Mr. Beauchamp, thinking that he divined the cause of his disquiet, observed, with a smile,—

“Dr. Miles must be here, I think, for, judging by small signs, such as the traces of wheels and an open gate, I imagine that he had left home before I passed.”

“Oh, yes ; he is here,” answered Sir John Slingsby, “he has been here ten minutes ; but the old boy, who is as neat in his person as in his ideas, had got a little dust upon his black coat, and has gone to brush it off and wash his hands. That open chaise of his costs him more time in washing and brushing, than writing his sermons ; but I can’t think what has become of that fellow Ned Hayward. The dog went out two hours ago for a walk through the Park up to the moor, and I suppose, ‘Thoughtless Ned,’ as we used to call him, has forgotten that we dine at half-past five. Well, we won’t wait for him ; as soon as the doctor comes we will order dinner, and fine him a bumper for being late.”

While he was speaking, Dr. Miles, the clergyman of the village through which Beauchamp had passed, entered the room, and shook him warmly by the hand. He was a tall spare man, with a look of florid health in his countenance, and snow-white hair ; his face was certainly not handsome, and there was a grave and somewhat stern expression in it, but yet it was pleasing, especially when he smiled ; which, to say the truth, was not often. It may seem a contradiction in terms to say that he laughed oftener than he smiled, yet so it was, for his laugh was not always good-humoured, especially in the house of Sir John Slingsby. There was, from time to time, something bitter and cynical in it, and generally found vent when anything was said, the folly of which he thought exceeded the wickedness. He was one of the few men of perfect respectability who was a constant visitor at Tarningham

House; but the truth was, that he was the rector of Sir John Slingsby's parish. Now, no consideration of tithes, perquisites, good dinners, comforts, and conveniences, would have induced Dr. Miles to do anything that he thought wrong; but he argued in this manner:—

"Sir John Slingsby is an old fool, and one who is likely to get worse instead of better, if nobody of more rational views, higher feelings, and more reasonable pursuits takes any notice of him. Now I, from my position, am bound to do the best I can to bring him to a better state of mind. I may effect something in this way by seeing him frequently. At all events, I can do much to prevent his becoming worse; my presence is some check upon these people; and even if it does little good to the father, there is that sweet, dear, amiable girl, who needs some support and comfort in her unpleasant situation."

Such were some of the considerations upon which Dr. Miles acted. There were many more, indeed, but these are enough for my purpose. He shook Beauchamp warmly by the hand, as we have seen, and seemed to be more intimate with him than anybody in the room, taking him aside and speaking to him for a moment or two in private, while Sir John Slingsby rang the bell and ordered dinner without waiting for Captain Hayward.

"William Slack, Sir John, has seen him," said the butler, "coming down the long avenue with something in his arms—he thinks it's a fawn."

"Well, then, he'll be here soon," said the master of the mansion; "serve dinner, serve dinner; by Jove, I won't wait! Devil take the fellow, the ensign shouldn't keep his colonel waiting. It's not respectful. I'll fine him two bumpers if the soup's off before he makes his appearance."

In the meantime, the first words of Dr. Miles to Mr. Beauchamp were, "I have made the inquiries, my dear sir, according to your request, and it is well worth the money. It will return, they say, four per cent. clear, which in these times is well enough."

"I have already determined upon it," said Beauchamp, "and have written to London about it."

"Ay, ay," said the worthy doctor, "just like all the rest of the world, my young friend—asking for advice, and acting without it."

"Not exactly," answered Beauchamp; "you told me before what you thought upon the subject, and I knew you were not one to express an opinion except upon good grounds. The only question is now, what lawyer I can employ here to arrange minor matters. The more im-

portant must, of course, be referred to my solicitors in London."

"We have no great choice," replied Dr. Miles; "there are but two in Tarningham, thank God. The one is a Mr. Wharton, the other a Mr. Bacon, neither of them particularly excellent specimens of humanity; but in the one the body is better than the mind, in the other the mind better than the body."

"Probably I should like the latter best," answered Beauchamp; "but pray, my dear doctor, give me a somewhat clearer knowledge of these two gentlemen for my guidance."

"Well, then, though I do not love in general to say aught in disparagement of my neighbours behind their backs," Dr. Miles replied, "I must, I suppose, be more definite. Mr. Wharton is a quiet, silent man, gentleman-like in appearance and in manners, cautious, plausible, and affecting friendship for his clients. I have never known him set the poor by the ears for the sake of small gains, or promote dissensions amongst farmers in order to make by a law-suit. On the contrary, I have heard him dissuade from legal proceedings, and say that quarrels are very foolish things."

"A good sort of person," said Beauchamp.

"Hear the other side, my dear sir," rejoined the doctor; "such game as I have been speaking of is too small for him. He was once poor; he is now very rich. I have rarely heard of his having a client who somehow did not ruin himself; and although I do not by any means intend to say that I have been able distinctly to trace Mr. Wharton's hand in their destruction, certain it is that the bulk of the property—at least a large share of what they squandered or lost—has found its way into his possession. I have seen him always ready to smooth men's way to ruin, to lend money, to encourage extravagance, to lull apprehension, to embarrass efforts at retrenchment, and then, when the beast was in the toils, to dispatch it and take his share. No mercy, then, when destruction is inevitable; the lawyer must be paid, and must be paid first."

"And now for Mr. Bacon," said Beauchamp.

"Why he is simply a vulgar little man," answered the clergyman, "coarse in manners and in person: cunning and yet stolid, but with a competent knowledge of law: and keen at finding out faults and flaws. His practice is in an inferior line to the other's, but he is at all events safer, and, I believe, more honest and sincere."

"How do you mean, cunning and stolid?" asked Beau-

champ. "Those two qualities would seem to me incompatible."

"Oh, dear, no," replied Dr. Miles; but before he could explain, the butler announced dinner; and as Sir John gave his arm to Mrs. Clifford, Beauchamp advanced towards Isabella. The doors were thrown wide open, and the party were issuing forth to cross the vestibule to the dining-room, when suddenly Sir John and his sister halted, encountered by an apparition which certainly was unexpected in the form that it assumed. In fact, they had not taken two steps out of the drawing-room ere the glass doors were flung open, and Ned Hayward stood before them, as unlike the Ned Hayward I first presented to the reader as possible. His coat was covered with a dull whitish gray powder, his linen soiled, and apparently singed, his hands and face as black as soot, his glossy brown hair rugged and burnt, no hat upon his head, and in his arms a very pretty boy of about two years old, or a little more perhaps, on whose face were evident marks of recent tears, though he seemed now pacified, and was staring about with large eyes at the various objects in the grand house to which he was just introduced.

"Why Ned, Ned, Ned! what in the mischief's name has happened to you?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby. "Have you all at once become 'a poor young man with a small family of young children?'"

"No, my dear sir," answered Ned Hayward, in a hurried tone, "but if you have any women in the house, I will give this little fellow into their care, and tell you all about it in a few minutes. Hush, my little man, hush! We are all friends: we will take care of you. Now don't cry again: no harm shall happen."

"Women! to be sure!" cried Sir John; "call the housekeeper, one of you rascals. Women! Hang it, Ned, do you think I could live in a house without women? A bottle of claret is not more necessary to my existence than the sight of a cap and a petticoat flying about the house—in the distance, Ned, in the distance! No brooms and dust-pans too near me; but in a discreet position, far enough off, yet visible, woman is the sunshine of a house."

"Give him to me, Captain Hayward," said Miss Clifford, holding out her arms for the boy. "He will be quiet with me, I am sure. Won't you, my poor little fellow?"

The child gazed at her strangely as she took him, letting go Dr. Miles's arm to do so; but, meeting the sweet smile that lighted up her beautiful face, he put his little arms round her neck the next moment, and hid his large blue

eyes upon her shoulder. She held him kindly there, speaking a few gentle words to him, while Ned Hayward, looking round the party, addressed himself to the worthy clergyman, inquiring, "You are the rector of this parish, sir, I think?"

Dr. Miles made a stiff bow, not prepossessed in favour of any of Sir John Slingsby's old friends, and answered as briefly as possible, "I am, sir."

"Then can you tell me," asked the young gentleman, cagerly, "if there was any woman up at the cottage on the moor?"

Dr. Miles started, and replied with a look of much greater interest, "No, sir—no. What has happened? Why do you ask? What cottage do you mean? There are three."

"I mean the cottage of a man called Gimlet," answered Ned Hayward. "I saw some women's clothes—gowns and things; and I thought there might be a woman there, that's all.—There was none, then?"

"There was one six months ago," replied the clergyman, in a very grave tone, "as lovely a creature as ever was seen, but she lies in my churchyard, poor thing! She is at peace."

"Thank God," said Ned Hayward, in a tone of relief. "Ah, here comes somebody for the child. My good lady, will you have the kindness to take good care of this little fellow. See that he is not burnt or hurt, and let him have some bread and milk, or things that children eat—I don't know very well what they are, but I dare say you do."

"Oh, by Jove! that she does!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby; "she feeds half the children in the parish. You take good care of him, Mrs. Hope—and now, Ned," he continued, turning from the housekeeper to his guest, "what the devil's the meaning of all this?"

"I will tell you by-and-bye, Sir John," answered Captain Hayward. "Pray go to dinner, and I will be down directly. Many apologies for being late; but it was not to be helped. I will not be ten minutes; but do not let me detain you—"

"But what is it all about? What has happened? What the deuce is the child?" exclaimed Sir John. "Do you think either men or women can eat soup or digest fish with their stomachs full of curiosity?"

"By-and-bye, Sir John," said Ned Hayward, making towards the stairs. "You shall have the whole story for dessert. At present I am dirty, and the dinner's waiting. It will get cold, and your curiosity keep hot."

Thus saying he left them, and the rest of the party proceeded to dinner.

CHAPTER X.

IF you quit the high-road from Tarningham on the right-hand side by the little sandy path, just a hundred yards on the other side of the stone pump, equidistant from it and the mile-stone which marks on the hither side five miles and a half from Tarningham, and walk straight on, it leads you over the moor, and through the midst of scenery very common in England, not much loved by ordinary rambles, but which for me and a few others has a peculiar and almost indescribable charm. The ground is broken, undulated, full of deep sand-pits and holes, frequently covered with gorse and heath, spotted occasionally with self-sown shrubs, a stunted hawthorn here and there, two or three melancholy firs, gathered together on the top of a mound, like a party of weary watchers trying to console each other by close companionship, while from time to time a few light birches, with their quivering leaves, thin, graceful arms, and ragged coats of silver and brown, are seen hanging over the edge of a bank, or decorating the side of a hollow. If you dip down into one of the low dells, a sensation of hermit-like solitude comes upon you. You believe that there at least you may be,

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot;”

and you feel an irresistible desire to sit down at the foot of this shrub, or that, where the roots, like the members of a well-governed state, serve to keep together, in close union, the light and incoherent materials that sustain them, and there to commune with your own thoughts in the silent presence of Nature. If you mount one of the little hills, the scene and the sensation are very different. The solitude is as deep, as striking; no living thing is to be seen, unless it be a wild curlew, with its thin arched wings, whirling away with a shrill cry in the enjoyment of its own loneliness; but there is an expansion, a grandeur, a strange sublimity in the extent of waste, with the long lines waving off in different hues like the billows of the ocean, first yellow sand and green short turf, then a brown mass, where the sight loses its distinctness, then perhaps a gleam of water, then a blue line, deeper as indigo, where the azure air and the black shade mingle together under some threatening cloud; then long undulations of

purple, fainter and fainter, till who shall say where earth ends and sky begins. The bleakness, the stillness, the solitariness, the varied colouring, the vast extent, the very monotony of the forms mingle together in a whole that has not less grandeur in it than the highest mountain that ever raised its proud brow above its brother giants.

In the reign of that King George under whose paternal sceptre flourished the English nation in the times whereof I am writing, there was a cottage in one of these sand-pits, a small lonely house, built of timber, laths, and mud, and containing two or three rooms. The materials were poor; ease and comfort seemed far from it; yet there was something altogether not unpleasant in the idea of dwelling in that sheltered nook, with the dry sand and the green bushes round, and feeling, that let the wind rave as it would over the hill, let it bend down the birch trees, and make the pines rustle and crack, and strike their branches against each other, the fury of the tempest could not reach one there—that let the rain pour down in ever such heavy torrents, as if the windows of heaven were open, the thirsty ground would drink up the streams as they fell, as if its drought were insatiable. There were signs of taste, too, about the building, of a humble and natural kind. Over the door had been formed with some labour a little sort of trellised portico, of rough wood-work, like an arbour, and upon this had been trained several plants of the wild-hop and the wild clematis, with one solitary creeping garden-rose. Sticks had been placed across the house, too, to afford a stay for these shrubs to spread themselves over the face of the cottage, if they had any strength to spare when they had covered the little portico, and two or three wandering shoots, like truant children, were already sporting along the fragile path thus afforded them.

The interior of the house was less prepossessing than the outside; the mud-floor, hard beaten down and very equally flattened, was dry enough, for the sand below it carried off all moisture; but in the walls of the rooms there was, alas! many a flaw through which sun or moon might shine, or the night-wind enter; and to say the truth, the inhabitants of the cottage were as much indebted to the banks of the pit for protection against such a cold visitant, as to the construction of their dwelling. The furniture was scanty and rude, seeming to have been made by a hand not altogether unaccustomed to the use of a carpenter's tools, but hastily and carelessly, so that in gazing round the sleeping-chamber, one was inclined to imagine that the common tent-bed which stood in one

corner, was the only article that had ever tenanted a shop. The great chest, the table, the two or three chairs, all spoke plainly the same artificer, and had that been all that the room contained, it would have looked very miserable indeed; but hanging from nails driven into the wall, were a number of very peculiar ornaments. There was a fox's head and a fox's brush, dried, and in good preservation; there was the gray skin of a badger, and the brown skin of an otter; birds of prey of various sizes and descriptions, the butcher-bird, the sparrow-hawk, and the buzzard, as well as several owls. Besides these zoological specimens, were hung up in the same manner a number of curious implements, the properties and applications of some of which were easy to divine, while others remained mysterious. There were two or three muzzles for dogs, which could be distinguished at once, but then by their side was a curious-looking contrivance, which appeared to be a Lilliputian wire-mousetrap, sewn on to some straps of leather. Then came a large coil of wire, a dog's collar, and a pair of greyhound slips. Next appeared something difficult to describe, having two saw-like jaws of iron, like a rat-trap, supported on semicircular bars which were fixed into a wooden handle, having a spring on the outside, and a revolving plate within. It was evident that the jaws could be opened and kept open in case of need, and had I been a hare, a rabbit, or any other delicate-footed animal, I should not have liked to trust my ankle within their gripe. I could describe several other instruments both of leather and iron, which were similarly suspended from the wall; but as I really cannot tell the reader what was the use of any one of them, it would be but labour thrown away. However, there were other things, the intent and purport of which were quite self-evident. Two or three small cages, a landing-net, fishing-rods, a gun, powder-flasks, shot-belts, a casting-net, and a clap-net, and by the side of the window hung four small cages, containing singing-birds.

But who was he in the midst of all this strange assortment? Was he the owner of this wild, lonely dwelling? Oh, no! it was a young man, dressed as none could be dressed, who frequented not very different scenes from those that lay around him. His clothes were not only those of a gentleman, but those of a gentleman who thought much of his own personal appearance—too much, indeed, to be perfectly gentlemanly. All that the tailor, the boot-maker, the hat-maker could do had been done to render the costume correct according to the fashion of the day;

but there was a certain something which may be called a too-smartness about it all—the colours were too bright, the cut too decidedly fashionable, to be quite in good taste. Neither was the arrangement of the hues altogether harmonious. There are the same colours in a China-aster and a rose, but yet what a difference in the appearance of the two flowers! and the same sort of difference, though not to the same extent, existed between the dress of the person before us and that of the truly well-dressed man, even of his own time. In most other respects, his appearance was good; he was tall, rather slightly formed than otherwise, and had none of that stiffness and rigidity which might have been anticipated from his apparel. Demeanour is almost always tinged more or less by character, and a wild, rash, vehement disposition will, as in his case, give a freedom to the movements which no drilling can altogether do away with. His features in themselves were not bad; but the whole countenance was disfigured by a black silk shade which covered the right eye, and a fresh scar all the way down the same side of the nose, while from underneath the shade, which was not large enough for its purpose, peeped out sundry rainbow rings of blue and yellow, invading both the cheek and the temple.

By these marks the reader has already perceived that this gentleman has been presented to him before, but in a very different garb, which he had thought fit to assume for his own particular purposes on the preceding night; and now he sat in the cottage of Stephen Gimlet the poacher, judging it expedient to keep himself at a distance from the peopled haunts of man, during the bright and bustling day at least. At night he proposed to betake himself to the inn which had been mentioned in his conversation with the housekeeper; but after his pleasant and hopeful conversation with his father, he had ridden straight to the dwelling of his companion, Wolf, where, on the preceding day, his portmanteaus had been left, after they had arranged their plans; and having stabled his horse in a shed at the back of the building, he had there passed the heavy hours of darkness, partly in bitter meditations, and partly in conversation with his comrade. Sleep could hardly be said to have visited his eyelids, for though, after he cast himself down to rest, he had dozed from time to time, yet agitating thoughts continually returned, and deprived him of all real repose.

At an early hour of the morning, and while it was still dark, Ste Gimlet had gone out, as was his wont; and rising with the first rays of the sun, Henry Wittingham em-

ployed himself in dressing with scrupulous care, and then filled up about half an hour more in making a black patch to hide his disfigured eye, out of an old silk handkerchief. When this was accomplished, wanting something or another to tie this covering in its right place, he looked round the room, but in vain. Leather straps, dog-collars, rat-traps, brass wire, would none of them do, and although near the nets there was lying a ball of whip-cord, he thought that such a decoration as a string made with that material would but ill accord with the rest of his habiliments. He therefore walked across the little passage to the next room, and lifted the coarse wooden latch of the door. He found the door locked, however, and muttering to himself, "D——n the fellow, did he think I would steal anything?" he was turning away, when a small sweet voice from within exclaimed, "I'm ready, daddy; I've got my stockings on."

"Oh, he's locked the child in—that's it," said Henry Wittingham, to himself, and then raising his voice, he said, "Your daddy's not come back, Charley; so lie still and be quiet."

Then returning to the next room, the brilliant thought struck him of cutting off the hem of the old silk handkerchief to make a string for the black patch, which task being accomplished, and all complete, he sat down, and thought.

And there he sat in thought, with the morning sunshine streaming around him—calm, and pure, and tranquil. What did he think of? Where did his meditations rest? On the happiness that was passed away, on the gay hours of childhood, on the sports of his boyish days, on the times when the world was young for him, and everything was full of freshness and enjoyment? Or did he think of the blessing cast away,—of wealth, and comfort, and ease, with no reasonable wish ungratified, no virtuous pleasure denied? Or did he look forward to the future with fear and anguish, and to the past with remorse and grief? Heaven only knows! But there he sat, with his head bent forward, his brow contracted, his teeth tight shut, his right arm fallen listlessly by his side, his left hand contracting and expanding involuntarily upon some fragments of silk on the table. He gazed forward through the window from under his bent brows. He saw not the sunshine, but he felt it, and loved it not; and ever and anon the dark shadows of strong emotion crossed his countenance, like misty clouds swept over the face of the mountain. He sat long, and was at heart impatient for his companion's return; but so strong was the hold

which thought had got upon him, "he knew not how time went. He heard not even the child cry in the neighbouring room, when, wearied with waiting, it got terrified at the unusual length of his father's absence.

The stout form of the poacher was at length seen descending the small steep path which led from the moor into the sand-pit. His step was slow and heavy, his air dull and discontented; but Harry Wittingham, as soon as he beheld him, started up, and opened the door of the cottage, exclaiming, "Well, Wolf, what news?"

"Neither the best in the world nor the worst," answered the man, somewhat sullenly.

"And what have you got for breakfast?" inquired the young gentleman; "I am as hungry as the devil!"

"You must wait a bit, though," answered Wolf, descending; "I must look after the boy first. Poor little man, I dare say he has cried his eyes out—I've been so long. But if you're in a great hurry you'd better light the fire, Master Harry; you'll find some wood in the corner there, and you can strike a light with the pi-stol flint."

Harry Wittingham did not look well pleased, and turning into the house again, walked to the window, and affected to hum a tune without undertaking the menial office that the other had assigned him. In the meanwhile, Wolf walked straight to the other door, unlocked it, and, catching up the beautiful boy, who was sitting, half-dressed, on a stool, crying, he pressed him eagerly to his breast and kissed him once or twice. There were strange and salutary thoughts passed through his brain at that moment. He asked himself what would have become of that child if he had been detained and taken to prison, as, indeed, had been very likely. Who would have let the boy out of that solitary room—who would have given him food—who would have nursed and tended him? And once or twice, while he was finishing what the child's tiny hands had left undone in attempting to dress himself, the father rubbed his brow and thought heavily. Say what man will of the natural affections, they are the best ties to good conduct.

When he had done, he took the boy by the hand and led him into the other room, gave a glance to the fire-place, and then to Harry Wittingham, as he stood at the window, and his brow gathered into a frown. He said nothing, however, lighted the fire himself, and, taking the fish from his pocket, proceeded to broil them. Then, from the great chest he drew out a knife or two, a cut loaf of coarse bread, and two or three glasses, which he placed upon the table, and giving his child a large hunch of the bread, told

him, in a whisper, as if it were a mighty secret, that he should have a nice trout in a minute. To Harry Wittingham he said not a word, till at length the other turning round, exclaimed, "Well, Wolf, you have not told me what news you bring."

"And you have not lighted the fire!" said Ste Gimlet. "If you think, Master Wittingham, that you can live in a place like this and keep your hands clean, you are mistaken. You must shape your manners to your company, or give it up."

Harry Wittingham felt inclined to make an angry answer; but, recollecting how much he was in his companion's power, prudence came to his aid, and he only replied, "Pooh, pooh, Wolf! I am not accustomed to light fires, and I do not know how to set about it."

"Faith, you may have to learn some day," answered his comrade. "When I built all this house, and made all these chairs and tables with my own hands, I knew as little about a trade I never thought to practise as you about this."

"Ay, you have practised many a trade in your day," said Harry Wittingham, "and I never but one."

"Nor that a very good one," murmured Wolf to himself; but the storm thus passed away for the time, and the trout were broiled and put in a plate, from which the two men and the little boy made each a hearty meal.

The magistrate's son suffered their breakfast to pass over without any further inquiry respecting the tidings which his companion had obtained in his morning's expedition; but after Ste Gimlet had produced a bottle of very fine white brandy, which certainly had not turned pale at the sight of a custom-house officer, and each of the men had taken a glass mixed with some of the cold water which formed the purer beverage of the child, the poacher vouchsafed the information, unasked, relating to Harry Wittingham a great part of what had taken place between himself and Ned Hayward. What he did not relate he probably thought of no consequence, though men's opinions might differ upon that subject; but, at all events, Harry Wittingham gathered that he had been met and narrowly escaped being apprehended by a man who had questioned him closely about the adventures of the night before, and who was acquainted with his name, and the share he had had in a somewhat perilous and disgraceful enterprise.

Such tidings cast Wolf's companion into another fit of dark and gloomy thought, in which he remained for about five minutes without uttering a word; but then he gave a start, and looked up with a gleam of satisfaction on his

face, as if some new and pleasant conclusion had suddenly presented itself to his mind.

"I'll tell you what, Ste," he said, "I've just thought of something. You must go down to Tarningham for me, and gather all the news you can about this fellow—find out who he is, and whether he is a London beak or not; and then when you have dorfe all that——"

"I shall do none of it, Master Harry," answered the poacher; "I won't stir another step in this business—I don't like it, sir; it's not in my way. I undertook it just to please you for old companionship's sake, and because you told me the young lady would have no objection; and then when I was in it I went through with it, though I saw well enough that she liked the thought of going as much as I should like to dance on a rope. But I will have no more to do with it now; it has done me enough harm already, and now I shall be watched ten times closer than ever, and lose my living—so go I do not."

"Come, come, Wolf, there's a good fellow—this is all nonsense," said Harry Wittingham, in a coaxing tone.

But the man cut him short, repeating sternly that he would not go.

"Then, by ——, I will go myself," exclaimed the young gentleman, with a blasphemous oath; "if you are afraid, I am not."

And, starting up he walked out of the cottage, took his way round to the shed at the back, trampling upon several of the flowers, which the poacher loved to cultivate, as he went; and in about a quarter of an hour he was seen riding up the little path towards the moor.

After he was gone, Ste Gimlet remained for some time in very thoughtful mood: now gazing idly at vacancy, now playing with the child's hair, or answering its infantine questions with an abstracted air. At length he muttered, "What's to be done now?" and then added aloud, "Well, something must be done. Go out and play in the garden, Charley."

The child toddled out right gladly, and the poacher set himself down to mend his bird-net; but ever and anon he laid down the cunning meshes on his knee, and let his thoughts entangle themselves in links not less intricate.

"I'll try the other thing," he said, after a time; "this does not do. I should not care for myself, but it's the poor baby. Poor dear Mary! That always rested on her heart, what I should do with the boy when she was gone. Well, I'll try and do better. Perhaps she is looking down on us—who knows?"

And then he fell to his work again with a sigh. He employed himself with several things for two or three hours. He finished the net; he made a wicker-basket—it was the first he had ever attempted, but he did it better than might have been expected, and then he called the boy in to his dinner, giving him a trout he had saved when he broiled the others. For his own part, he contented himself with a lump of the bread. When that was done, he went and caught some small birds on the moor, just above the edge of the pit, where he could see the child playing below. When he had thus provided their light supper—for the luxury of tea was unknown in Ste Gimlet's cottage—he came back and sat down by the boy, and played with him fondly for several minutes, gazing at him with a melancholy earnestness, which mingled even with the smile of joy and pride that lighted his eyes, as some movement of childish grace called forth the beauties of his child. Nevertheless, from time to time, there was a sort of absent look; and twice he went up to the bank above, and gazed out over the moor towards Tarningham. At length he went away far enough to climb to the top of the neighbouring barrow or tumulus, after having told the boy not to venture up the path. From the position in which he then stood, he had a fair view of the scene I have already described, and caught the windings of the high road down the hill more distinctly than from below.

"I shouldn't wonder if they had caught him," said Wolf to himself with a frown, and an anxious expression of countenance, "and then he will say it was my fault, and that I was afraid to go, and all that!—Hang it! why should I care what he says or what he thinks?" And with this reflection he turned round and went back homeward. He found the boy at the top of the bank, however, and gave him a gentle shake, scolding him till the big drops began to gather in his large blue eyes.

Stephen Gimlet was not satisfied with himself, and scolding the child he found did not act as a diversion to his own self-reproaches. After he had set his son playing again, he walked about moodily for near a quarter of an hour, and then burst forth impetuously, saying,—

"I can't stand this; I must go and see what's become of him—they'll know at the turnpike if he's passed, and the old woman won't blab. Here, Charley, boy, you must go and play in the house now—it's growing late, and I'm going away—I shan't be long, and you shall have the bird-cages to play with."

The boy seemed to be well accustomed to it, and potted

away to the house before his father, without any signs of reluctance. He was placed in the same room where he had been in the morning, some empty birdcages and two or three other things were given him for his amusement, and, locking the door of the chamber, the poacher walked away, saying with a sigh, "There can no harm happen this time, for I am going to do no wrong to any one."

Vain, however, are all such calculations. The faults and virtues of others, as well as our own faults and virtues, enter into the strange composition of our fate, and affect us darkly and mysteriously, in a manner which we can never foresee.

The poacher had left his own door about a quarter of an hour, when two men took their way down into the sand-pit, the one on horseback, the other on foot. Harry Wittingham fastened his horse's bridle to the latch of the door, and going in with his companion, looked round for Wolf, then crossing over to the other chamber, and finding it locked, he said,—

"Stephen isn't here. There, take that up, and be off with it;" and he pointed to his portmanteau in the corner where it lay.

The other man, who seemed a common farm-servant, or one of the inferior stable-men of an inn, got the portmanteau on his shoulder, and walked away with it; and Harry Wittingham remained for a minute or two with his hands behind his back looking out of the window. At the end of that time he said aloud: "Well, it's no use waiting for him; we should only have a row, I dare say, so I'll be off, too."

Before he went, however, he looked round the place for a moment, with an expression of mockery and contempt. What was in his bosom, it would be difficult to say, for the heart of man is full of strange things. Perhaps he felt it unpleasant to be under an obligation to the owner of that poor tenement, even for a night's shelter, and strove to salve the wound of pride by reducing the obligation to the lowest point in his own estimation. He might think that the misery he saw around did not make it a very desirable resting-place, and that he had little to be thankful for in having been permitted to share a beggar's hut. His eyes, as he gazed around, fell upon some embers of smouldering wood on the hearth, and that called to mind one of the many bad habits which he had lately acquired, and in which he had not yet indulged through the whole of that day. He accordingly put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out some cigars, then not very common in England.

Next taking up with the tongs a piece of the charred and still burning wood, he lighted one of the rolls of weed, cast down the ember, and threw the tongs back upon the hearth; after which, mounting his horse, he cantered away as blithely as if his heart had been innocent as a child's.

The ember fell upon the earthen floor, where, under ordinary circumstances, it could do no harm; but it so happened that Stephen Gimlet, when he had done mending the net, had cast down the hank of twine close by the table. A long end of the string had fallen towards the fire-place, and a moment or two after Henry Wittingham had quitted the cottage, the piece of charred wood itself became black, but a small spot of fire was seen close to it, and a thin filmy curl of smoke arose. It went on smouldering for about five minutes, creeping forwards inch by inch, and then a gust of wind through the door, which Harry Wittingham had left open, fanned it, and a flame broke out. Then it ran rapidly along, and caught the hank of twine, which was in a blaze in a moment. It spared the netting-needle, which was of hard box-wood, and for an instant seemed to promise to go out of itself; but then the flame leaped up, and the meshes of the net, which had been left partly on the table, partly on a chair, showed a spark here and there, flashed with the flame, and then, oh, how eagerly the greedy element commenced devouring all that it could meet with! Wherever there was a piece of wood-work it seized upon it; the table, the chair, the poles of the net, the upright posts of the wall, the beams of the roof, the thatch itself, and then instantly a cloud of dull black smoke, mixed with sparks, rose up upon the moor, from the sand-pit. The heat became intense, the smoke penetrated into the other chamber, the sparks began to fall before the window, a red light spread around, and then the terrified screams of a child were heard.

About a quarter of an hour before, a gentleman had appeared upon the moor, from the side of Sir John Slingsby's park. He had come up the hill as if he were walking for a wager, for there was something in the resistance of the acclivity to his progress, which made the vigorous spirit of youth and health resolute to conquer it triumphantly. When the feat was done, however, and the hill passed as if it had been a piece of level ground, Ned Hayward slackened his pace and looked about him; enjoyed to the full all that the wide expanse had of grand and fine, breathed freer in the high air, and let the spirit of solitary grandeur sink into his heart. He had none of the affected love of the picturesque and the sublime, which make the

folks who assume the poetical so ridiculous. He was rather inclined to check what people call fine feelings than not ; he was disposed to fancy himself, and to make other people fancy him, a very common-place sort of person, and he would not have gone into an ecstasy for the world, even at the very finest thing that the world ever produced ; but he could not help, for the life of him, feeling everything that was beautiful and great, more than he altogether liked, so that when in society he passed it off with a touch of persiflage, putting that sort of shield over what he felt to be a vulnerable point. Now, however, when he happened to be alone, he let Nature have her way, and holding his riding-whip by both ends, walked here and walked there, gazing at the prospect where he could get a sight of it, and looking to the right and the left, as if not to let any point of loveliness escape him. His eyes soon fell upon the little tumulus already mentioned, with the sentinel fir-trees keeping guard upon the top, and thinking that there must be a good look-out from that high position, he walked slowly up, and gazed over the park towards Tarningham. Suddenly, however, his eyes were drawn to the other side, as a cloud of white smoke came rolling up out of the sand-pit.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "my friend Master Wolf lighting his fire, I suppose."

But the smoke increased. Ned Hayward thought he saw some sparks rising over the bushes. A sudden sensation of apprehension crossed his mind, and he walked rapidly down the side of the hillock, and crossed the intervening space with a step quick in reality, though intended to appear leisurely ; but in a moment a cloud of deeper-coloured smoke, tinged with flame, burst up into the evening air, and he sprang forward at full speed. A few bounds brought him to the side of the pit ; and, as he reached it, a scream met his ear. It was the easily recognised voice of childhood, in terror or in pain, and Ned Hayward hesitated not an instant. There was a path down a couple of hundred yards away to the left, but the scene before his eyes counselled no delay. There was the cottage, with the further part of the thatch all in a blaze, the window of the room beneath it fallen in, and the flame rushing forth, a cloud of smoke issuing from the door, and scream after scream proceeding from the nearer end of the building. His riding-whip was cast down at once, and grasping the stem of the birch-tree rooted in the very edge, he swung himself over, thinking to drop upon a sloping part of the bank about ten feet below. The filmy

roots of the shrub, however, had not sufficient hold upon the sandy soil to sustain his weight; the tree bent, gave way, and came down over him with a part of the bank, so that he and his frail support rolled together to the bottom of the pit. He was up in an instant, however—he might be hurt or he might not, he knew nothing about it—but the shrill cry of the child rang in his ear, and he darted forward to the cottage doorway. It was full of fire, and dark with suffocating vapour, but in he rushed, scorching his hair, hands, his face, and his clothes. He found the other door blackened, and in some places alight with the encroaching fire; tried to open it, but failed, and then shouted aloud, “Keep back, keep back! and I will burst it open;” and then, setting his foot against it, he cast it with a vigorous effort into the room. A momentary glance around showed him the child, who had crept as near to the window as possible, and, darting forward, Ned Hayward caught the boy up in his arms, and rushed out with him, covering his head with his arm, that none of the beams, which were beginning to fall, might strike him as they passed; then setting him down on the green turf when they were at a little distance, he asked eagerly, “Are there any more?”

The child, however, stupified with terror, gazed in his face and cried bitterly, but answered not. Seeing he could obtain no reply, Ned Hayward ran back to the cottage, and tried to go in again, but it was now impossible; the whole way was blocked up with burning rafters, and large detached masses of the thatch, which had fallen in, and were now sending up vast showers of sparks as the wind stirred them. He hurried to the window, and looked in, and though the small panes were cracking with the heat, he forced it open, and shouted at the extreme pitch of his voice, to drown the rushing sound of the fire, “Is there any one within?”

There was no answer; and the moment after, the dry beams being burnt away, and the support at the other end gone, the whole thatch above gave way, and fell into the room, while the flame rushed up into a spire as it descended.

The heat was now intolerable, and forced a retreat to a distance. Captain Hayward took the boy up in his arms, and strove to soothe him, and gain some information from him. It was all in vain, however; and, after a moment's thought, the gentleman said to himself, “I will carry him away to Tarningham House. Jack Slingsby will never refuse him food and shelter, I am sure, and in case there

should be any one else in the place, it is vain to hope that one could save them now. We can send up people to look for the bodies. But let us see what's at the back of the house." He accordingly walked round, still carrying the boy in his arms, but found nothing there, except a low detached shed, which seemed in security, as the wind blew the other way. A long trough and spout, indeed, between the shed and the cottage, appeared in a somewhat perilous position, and as it was likely that they might lead the fire to the building yet uninjured, Ned Hayward thought fit to remove them before he left the ground. This cost him some trouble, as they were rooted in the sand; but when it was once accomplished, he took up the boy again, sought his hat, but could not find it, and crossing the moor, entered the western gates of Sir John Slingsby's park, without meeting any one from whom he could obtain information, or to whom he could communicate the event which had just occurred.

CHAPTER XI.

THE events detailed in the last chapter, or at least that portion of them in which he himself had borne a share, were related by Ned Hayward to the party at Sir John Slingsby's, after he had rejoined them at the dinner-table, having done his best to remove the traces of his adventure from his personal appearance. The smoke and sand were washed away, the burnt and singed garments had been changed for others, and Ned Hayward still appeared a very good-looking fellow, not the less interesting, perhaps, in the eyes of the ladies there present, for all that he had done and suffered. Nevertheless, the fine wavy curls of his brown hair, which had been burnt off, were not to be recovered in so short a time, and both his hands showed evident signs of having been injured by the fire. He was in high spirits, for the assurance that there could be nobody else in the cottage but the boy, unless it were Gintet the poacher himself, of which there was no probability, had relieved the young gentleman's mind of a heavy weight, and, jesting gaily with Sir John Slingsby, who vowed that with those hands of his he would not be able to throw a line for a fortnight, he replied, that he would undertake to catch the finest trout in the whole water before noon the next day.

"And now, my dear sir," he continued, turning to the clergyman, "as you seem to know something of this good

gentleman, Gimlet, and his affairs, I wish you'd give me a little insight into his history."

"It is a sad and not uncommon one," answered Dr. Miles, gravely, "and I will tell it you some other time. My poor parishioners have a superstitious feeling about that pit, and that cottage, for a man was murdered there some years ago. You will find multitudes of people who will vouch for his ghost having been seen sitting on the bank above, and under a solitary birch-tree."

"It won't sit there any more," answered Ned Hayward, laughing; "for the birch-tree and I rolled down into the pit together, as I tried to drop down by its help, thinking it was quite strong enough to support me."

"Then I am afraid the ghost is gone altogether for the future," said Dr. Miles, in a tone of some regret.

"Afraid! my dear doctor," exclaimed Miss Slingsby; "surely you do not want ghosts among your parishioners?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sir John Slingsby, with a merry, fat, overflowing chuckle. "Isabella means, doctor, that you may make your flock as spiritual as you please, but not reduce them quite to spectres."

"No, papa, you are a wrong interpreter," rejoined his daughter; "I meant to say, that of all men on earth, I should have thought Dr. Miles was the last to patronise a ghost."

"I don't know, my dear," replied the worthy clergyman, "a ghost is sometimes very servicable in a parish. We are but children of a bigger growth, and a bugbear is as necessary sometimes for great babies as small ones; not that I ever used it or should use it; but the people's own imagination did that for me. I have heard, Sir John, that some men when they were lying out to shoot your deer, were scared away by one of them fancying he saw the ghost, and you saved two good haunches of venison, to say nothing of the pasty."

"By Jove, that was a jolly ghost indeed," answered Sir John Slingsby; "and I'll give him a crown the first time I meet him. Doctor, a glass of wine."

"If ghosts had such effects upon poachers," said Beauchamp, who had been speaking in a low tone to Miss Slingsby, "how happens it that this man, the father of the boy whom Captain Hayward brought hither, fixed his abode in the spirit's immediate neighbourhood?"

"Oh, he is a sad unbelieving dog," said Dr. Miles; but then, suddenly checking himself, he added, "and, yet in that I do him injustice; there is some good in the man and a great deal of imagination. Half his faults proceed

"from an ill-disciplined fancy; but the truth is, being a very fearless fellow, and of this imaginative disposition, I believe he would just as soon have a ghost for a next-door neighbour as not. Therefore, I do not suppose that it was from any doubt of the reality of the apparition, but rather in defiance of it, that he set up his abode there; and perhaps he thought, too, that it might serve as a sort of safeguard to him, a protection against the intrusion of persons less bold than himself, at those hours when ghosts and he himself are wont to wander. He knew well that none of the country people would come near him then, for all the ignorant believe in apparitions more or less."

"Now, dear Dr. Miles, do tell me," cried Isabella Slingsby with a gay laugh, "whether some of the learned do not believe in them, too. If it were put as a serious question to the Rev. Dr. Miles himself, whether he had not a little quiet belief at the bottom of his heart in the appearance of ghosts, what would he answer?"

"That he had never seen one, my dear," replied the clergyman, with a good-humoured smile; "but at the same time I must say that a belief in the occasional appearance of the spirits of the dead for particular purposes, is a part of our religion. I have no idea of a man calling himself a Christian and taking what parts of the Bible he likes, and rejecting or explaining away the rest. The fact of the re-appearance of dead people on this earth is more than once mentioned in Scripture, and therefore I believe that it has taken place. The purposes for which it was permitted in all the instances there noticed were great and momentous, and it may very possibly be that, since the Advent of Our Saviour, no such deviations from usual laws have been requisite. Of that, however, I can be no judge: but, at all events, my own reason tells me, that it is not probable a spirit should be allowed to revisit the glimpses of the moon for the purpose of making an old woman say her prayers, or frightening a village girl into fits."

"You are speaking alone of the apparition of the spirits of the dead," said Mr. Beauchamp; "did you ever hear of the appearance of the spirits of the living?"

"Not without their bodies, surely!" said Miss Clifford.

"Oh, yes, my dear Mary," answered Dr. Miles, "such things are recorded. I can assure you, ay, and upon testimony so strong that it is impossible to doubt that the witnesses believed what they related, whether the apparition was a delusion of their own fancy or not—indeed, it is scarcely possible to suppose that it was a delusion, for in

several instances the thing, whatever it was, made itself visible to several persons at once, and they all precisely agreed in the description of it."

"One of the most curious occurrences of the kind that ever I heard of," said Beauchamp, "was told me by a German gentleman to whom it happened. It was the case of a man seeing his own spirit, and although we are continually told we ought to know ourselves, few men have ever had such an opportunity of doing so as this gentleman."

"Oh, do tell us the whole story, Mr. Beauchamp," cried Isabella, eagerly; "I must beg and entreat that you would not tantalise us with a mere glimpse of such a delightful vision, and then let fall the curtain again."

"My dear Bella, you are tantalising him," exclaimed her father. "Don't you see that you are preventing him from eating his dinner; at all events, we will have a glass of wine first; shall it be Hermitage, Mr. Beauchamp? I have some of 1808, the year before that rascal Napoleon mixed all the vintages together."

The wine was drunk, but immediately this was accomplished, Isabella renewed her attack, calling upon Mr. Beauchamp for the story, and in her eagerness laying one round taper finger upon his arm as he sat beside her, to impress more fully her commands upon him, as she said, "I must and will have the story, Mr. Beauchamp."

"Assuredly," he replied, in his usual quiet tone; "but first of all, I must premise one or two things, that you may give it all the weight it deserves. The gentleman who told it to me was, at the time of my acquaintance with him, a man of about seventy years of age, very simple in his manners, and, however excitable his fancy might have been in youth, he was at the time I speak of as unimaginative a person as it is possible to conceive. He assured me most solemnly, as an old man upon the verge of eternity, that every word he spoke was truth; and now I will tell it as nearly in his own language as I can, and my memory is a very retentive one. You must remember, however, that it is he who is speaking, and not I; and fancy us sitting together, the old man and the young one, warming ourselves by a stove on a winter's night, in the fine old town of Nuremberg."

THE OLD MAN'S STORY.

"I am of an Italian family," said my friend, "but my father and my grandfather were both born in Germany; exceedingly good people in their way, but by no means very wealthy. My elder brother was being educated for a

physician, and had just finished his course of study, when my father, having given me as good an education as he could in Nuremberg, thought fit to send me to Hamburg, that I might pursue my studies there, and take advantage of any opportunity that might occur for advancing myself in life. My stock of all kinds was exceedingly small when I set out; my purse contained the closely-estimated expenses of my journey, and the allowance made for my maintenance during six months, which did not admit of the slightest idea of luxury of any kind. I was grateful, however, for what was given, for I knew that my father could afford no more, and I had no hope of another 'heller'* till my half year was out. I had my ordinary travelling dress, and my mother gave me six new shirts, which she had spun with her own hands; besides these, my portmantean contained one complete black suit, two pairs of shoes, and a pair of silver buckles, which my father took off his own feet, and bestowed upon me, with his benediction. My elder brother always loved me, and was kind to me; and when my going was first talked of, he regretted deeply that he had nothing to give me; but my little preparations occupied a fortnight, and during that time good luck befriended him and me, and he treated and killed his first patient skilfully. Thus he obtained the means of making me a sumptuous present for my journey, which consisted of a straight-cut blue mantle with a square collar. Let me dwell upon the mantle, for it is important. It was in the Nuremberg fashion, which had gone out of vogue over all the rest of Germany for at least thirty years, and when I first put it on, I felt very proud of it, thinking that I looked like one of the cavaliers in the great picture in the town-hall. However, there was not another mantle like it in all Germany, except in Nuremberg—sky-blue, falling three inches below the knee, with a square-cut collar. I will pass over my journey to Hamburg, till my arrival in a little common inn, in the old part of the town. Not having a pfenning to spare, I set out early the next morning to look out for a lodging, and saw several that would have suited myself very well, but which did not suit my finances. At length, perceiving the wife of a grocer standing at a door, with a good-humoured countenance, in a narrow and dark street, containing some large, fine houses, which had seen the splendours of former times, I walked up to her and asked if she could recommend a lodging to a young man who was not over rich. After thinking for a moment,

* The smallest German coin, till a certain prince thought fit to coin half-hellers.

she pointed across the way, to a house with a decorated front, which had become as black as ink with age. The lower story was entirely occupied by an iron-warehouse; but she said that up above on the first floor, I should find Widow Gentner, who let one room, and who had, she believed, no lodger at the time. I thanked her many times for her civility, and walking across the street to the point she indicated, I looked up at the cornices and other ornaments which were displayed upon the façade. Dirty they were, beyond all doubt. A pair of stone ladies with baskets in their hands, which had probably been once as white as snow, now displayed long dripping lines of black upon their garments; their noses had disappeared, but the balls of the eyes were of the deepest brown, though about the centre appeared a white spot, which seemed to show the presence of cataract. The fruit in the baskets, however, consisted apparently of black cherries, and a dingy cornucopia, which stood by the side of each, vomited forth swarthy fruit and flowers of a very uninviting quality. I gazed in surprise and admiration, and asked myself if it ever would be my fate to live in so fine a mansion. Taking courage, however, I inquired at the ironmonger's which was the door of Widow Gentner, and of the three which opened into the lower part of the house, I was directed to the second. On the first floor I found a tidy little maid, who introduced me to the presence of her mistress, a quiet, dry old lady, who was seated in a room which had apparently formed part of a magnificent saloon—I say formed part, for it was evident that the size of the chamber had been much curtailed. On the ceiling, which was of the most magnificent stucco work I ever saw, appeared various groups of angels and cherubs in high relief, as large as life, and seated amidst clouds and bunches of flowers as big as feather-beds. But that ceiling betrayed the dismemberment of the room; for all along the side where ran the wall behind the good lady were seen angels' legs without the heads and bodies, baskets of flowers cut in two, and cherubs with not above one-half of those members even which sculptors have left them. This was soon explained: the widow informed me that she had divided her chamber into three, of which she reserved one for herself, another for her little maid, and let the third, which had a staircase to itself opening from the street. She had done so with a good wall, she said, to support the plafond, so that if I wanted to see the room she had to let, I must go down again with her and mount the other stairs, as there was no door of communication. I admired her prudence, and ac-

accompanied her at once to a small room, arrived at by a narrow staircase with its own street door; and there I found on the ceiling above my head, the lost bodies and wings of the angels on the other side, besides a very solid pair of cherubims of my own. It contained a little, narrow bed, a table, a scanty proportion of chairs and other things necessary for the existence of a student; and though an unpleasant feeling of solitude crept over me as I thought of inhabiting an apartment so entirely cut off from all human proximity, yet, as the widow's rent was small, I closed the bargain at once, and soon was installed in my new abode. The good lady was very kind and attentive, and did all she could to make me comfortable, inquiring, amongst other things, what letters of introduction I had in Hamburg. I had but one which I considered of any value, which was addressed, with many of those flourishes which you know are common amongst us, to Mr. S., a famous man in his day, both as a philosopher and literary man, and was also a man of sense, of the world, and, what is more than all, of a kind and benevolent heart. I went to deliver it that very day, and met with a most friendly reception from a good-looking old gentleman, of perhaps sixty-three or four, who at once made me feel myself at home with him, treating me with that parental air which inspires both respect and confidence. He asked several questions about my journey, where I lodged, how I intended to employ my time, and last, what was the state of my finances. I told him all exactly as it was, and when I rose to depart, he laid his hand on my arm with the most benevolent air in the world, saying, 'You will dine with me to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and I shall expect to see you at dinner three days in the week as long as you stay. From eight to ten at night I am always at home, and whenever you have nothing else to do, come in and spend those hours with us.' I will not pretend to say I was not quite well aware that the place thus granted me at his dinner-table was offered from a knowledge of the limited state of my finances; but pride in my case was out of the question, and I was exceedingly grateful for the act of kindness, which saved me a considerable sum in my house-keeping, and enabled me to indulge in a few little luxuries which I could not otherwise have commanded.

"It was the autumn of the year when I arrived at Hamburg; but the time passed very pleasantly. All the day I was engaged in my studies; at twelve o'clock I dined, either at my own chamber or at worthy Mr. S.'s, and almost every evening was spent at his house, where he

failed not to regale me, either with a cup of fine coffee, or sometimes, as a great treat, with a cup of tea, according to your English mode. In short, I became his nightly guest, and as the evenings grew dark and sometimes foggy, I bought a little lantern to light myself through the long and lonely streets which I had to pass from his house to my own. On these occasions, too, as the weather grew intensely cold, my blue cloak with the square collar proved a most servicable friend, and every night at ten o'clock I might be seen in precisely the same attire, with my black suit, in great part covered by the azure mantle, and the small lantern in my hand, finding my way homeward to my solitary abode. Mr. S. lived in the fine new part of the town, where he had a handsome house, with two maid-servants and his coachman, but the latter slept at the stables. I lived, as I have before said, in the old part of the town, well nigh a mile distant; thus, in coming and going, I got exercise at night, if I did not in the day, and I mark it particularly, that I used to enjoy my walk to his house and back, and used to look forward to it with pleasure during my hours of study, in order that you may see, that on the occasion of which I am about to speak, I was affected by no fantastical melancholy.

"At length, one night in the winter of 17—, after passing the evening at the house of Mr. S., where I had taken nothing but a cup of coffee and a slice of brown bread and butter, I took leave of my friend, put on my blue mantle with a square collar, lighted my lantern at the housemaid's candle, and having safely shut the glass, set out on my walk home. It was about a quarter-past ten, and the night was clear and very dark; the sky, indeed, was full of stars, which looked peculiarly bright, as I gazed up at them between the tall houses as if from the bottom of a well, and I felt a sort of exhilarating freshness in the air that raised my spirits rather than otherwise. I walked along to the end of the first street with a light step, turned into the second, and was just entering the third, when I saw a figure some thirty or forty paces before me, standing in a corner as if waiting for some one. Although the streets, in the good old days of Hamburg, were generally by that time of night quite deserted, yet there was nothing extraordinary in my meeting one or two persons as I went home, so that I took little or no notice of this figure, till I had advanced to within about twenty paces, when it turned itself full towards me, and at the same time the light of my lantern fell directly upon it. Guess my surprise, when I saw a being so exactly like myself, that I could have ima-

gined I was looking in a glass. There were the black legs, the shoes and silver buckles, the blue mantle with the square-cut collar, and the little lantern with the handle at the back, held just as I held mine. I stopped suddenly, and rubbed my eyes with my left hand; but the figure immediately turned round and walked away before me. At the same time my heart beat violently, and a sort of strange, dreamy sensation of horror came over me, like that which takes possession of one sometimes when labouring under the nightmare. An instant's reflection made me ashamed of what I felt, and saying to myself, 'I'll look a little closer at this gentleman,' I walked on, hurrying my pace. The figure, however, quickened its steps in the same proportion. I did not like to run, but I was always a quick walker, and I hastened as fast as ever I could; but it had no effect; the figure, without the least apparent effort, kept always at the same distance, and every moment I felt the sort of superstitious dread which had taken possession of me increasing, and struggling against the efforts of resolution. Resolution conquered, however; and, determined to see who this was that was so like me, without showing him too plainly that I was chasing him, I stopped at a corner where a street wound round, entering again the one that I was pursuing at some distance, and then taking, to my heels, I ran as hard as I could to get before my friend in the blue mantle. When I returned to the other street again, though I must have gained two or three minutes at least, instead of seeing the figure coming from the side where I had left it, there it was, walking on deliberately in the direction I usually followed towards my own house. We were now within three streets of Widow Gentner's, and, though they were all of them narrow enough, I generally took those which were most open. There was a lane, however, to the left, which, passing by the grocer's I have mentioned, cut off at least a quarter of the way, and as I was now overpowered by feelings I cannot describe, I resolved to take the shortest path, and run as hard as I could, in order to get home, and shut myself in before the figure in the blue mantle reached the spot. Off I set, then, down the narrow lane like lightning, but when I came to the grocer's corner, my horror was complete, on beholding the same figure, walking along past the closed windows of the iron-shop, and I stopped, with my heart beating as if it would have burst through my ribs. With eyes almost starting from my head, and the light of the lantern turned full upon it, I gazed at its proceedings, when behold, it walked quietly up

to my door, stopped, turned round towards the house, put the right hand in its pocket, and seemed feeling for my key. The key was produced, and stooping down, just as I should have done, after a little searching for the keyhole, the door was opened, the figure went in, and instantly the door closed again.

"If you had given me the empire of a world, I could not have made up my mind to go in after it, and setting off more like a madman than anything else, I returned to the house of Mr. S., with the intention of telling him what had occurred. The bell was answered quickly enough by the housemaid, who gazed at my wild and scared appearance with some surprise. She told me, however, that the old gentleman had gone to bed, and that she could not think of waking him on any account; and, resolved not to go home, and yet not liking to walk the streets of Hamburg all night, I persuaded her, with some difficulty, to let me sit in the saloon till I could speak with Mr. S. in the morning. I will not detain you by describing how I passed the night; but when my friend came down the next day, I related to him all that occurred, with many excuses for the liberty I had taken. He listened gravely, and his first question naturally was, if I were quite sure I had gone straight homeward, without entering any of those places where strong drinks were sold. I assured him most solemnly that the only thing that had entered my lips that night was the cup of coffee which I had taken at his house.

"The maid can tell you," I said, "that I had not been absent more than three-quarters of an hour when I returned."

"Well, my young friend," he replied, "I believe you fully; very strange things occasionally happen to us in life; and this seems one. However, we will have some breakfast, and then go and inquire into it."

"After breakfast, we set out, and walked to my house, I pointing out by the way all the different spots connected with my tale. When we reached the gloomy old mansion, with its decorated front, I was going direct to my own door, but Mr. S. said, 'Stay, we will first talk to your landlady for a minute.' And we accordingly walked up to the rooms of Widow Gentner by the other door and the other staircase. The widow was very proud of the visit of so distinguished a person in the town as Mr. S., and answered his questions with due respect. The first was a very common one in that part of Germany—namely,

whether she had slept well that night. She assured him she had, perfectly well; and he then proceeded, with a somewhat impressive air, to inquire if nothing had occurred to disturb her. She then suddenly seemed to recollect herself, and answered, 'Now you mention it, I recollect I was awake about eleven o'clock, I think, by a noise on the other side of the wall;' but thinking that Mr. Z. had thrown over his table, or something of that kind, I turned on the other side, and went to sleep again.'

"No further information being to be obtained, we descended to the street, and, taking out my keys, I opened the door, and we went in. My heart beat a little as we mounted the stairs; but, resolving not to show any want of courage, I boldly unlocked the room-door, and threw it open. The sight that presented itself made me pause on the threshold, for there on my bed, where I should have been lying at the very moment of its fall, was the whole ceiling of that part of the room, angels' heads, and cherubims' wings, flower-baskets, and everything; and so great was the weight and the force with which it had come down, that it had broken the solid bedstead underneath it. As I do not suppose my head is formed of much more strong materials, it is probable that it would have been cracked as well as the bed, and I heartily thank God for my preservation! All my good old friend ventured to say, however, was, 'A most fortunate escape! Had you slept here last night, you would have been killed to a certainty.' 'Though a doctor of philosophy, he did not risk any speculations upon the strange apparition which I had beheld the night before; but invited me to take up my abode in his house till my room could be put in order, never afterwards mentioning the appearance of my double; and I have only to add that from that time to this, now between fifty and sixty years, I have never seen myself again, except in a looking-glass."

"Such," continued Beauchamp, "is the story of my German friend, exactly as he told it to me. I must leave you to judge of it as you will, for, unless you could see the old man, and know his perfect simplicity of character, and quiet matter-of-fact temper of mind, you could not take the same view of his history that I do."

"In short, Mr. Beauchamp, you are a believer in ghosts," said Sir John Slingsby, laughing; "well, for my part, I never saw any better spirit than a bottle of brandy, and hope never to see a worse."

"Take care you don't find yourself mistaken, Sir John," answered Dr. Miles, "for although it is rather difficult to meet with good spirits, the bad ones are much more easily conjured up."

"I am not afraid, doctor," answered Sir John; "and mind, I have only had three or four glasses of wine, so mine is not Dutch courage now; but let us talk of something else than ghosts and such things, or we shall all have the blue devils before we've done—a capital story nevertheless, Beauchamp; but this is a good story, too, doctor, about my sister being stopped on the king's highway. Has she told you about it?"

Dr. Miles merely nodded his head, and Sir John went on.

"I can't make out the game of that old rascal Wittingham, who seems devilish unwilling to catch the thieves, and had taken himself out of the way when Ned Hayward and I called this morning. The old linen-drapering scamp shall find that he can't treat Jack Slingsby in this way."

"Indeed, my dear brother, I wish you would let the matter rest," said Mrs. Clifford; "no harm was done, except frightening me very foolishly, and to pursue it further may, perhaps, lead to disagreeable consequences. The letter written beforehand, to bring me over by a report of your illness, shows that this was no ordinary affair."

"A fig for the consequences," cried Sir John Slingsby; "if it were to set half the town on fire, I would go on with it. Why, my dear Harriet, am not I a magistrate, one of his majesty's justices of the peace for the county of——? Such a conscientious woman as you are would never have me neglect my solemn duties?" And Sir John chuckled with a low merry laugh, at the new view he chose to take of his responsibilities.

In such conversation the dinner went on to its close, the subjects changing rapidly, for the worthy baronet was not one to adhere tenaciously to any particular line of thought, and Mrs. Clifford, but more particularly still her daughter, being anxious to quit the topic just started as soon as possible. Miss Clifford, indeed, seemed so much agitated and embarrassed, whilst the adventures of the preceding night were under discussion, that Ned Hayward, who was the kindest-hearted man alive, and not without tact, especially where women were concerned, came zealously to her relief, and engaged her in low and earnest conversation.

It was one of those cases in which two people, without well knowing what they are about, go on puzzling each other, though both may be as frank as day. They talked of every simple subject which all the world might have

heard discussed—music, painting, poetry; but yet the whole was carried on in so low a tone that, to any one that did not know them, it would have appeared that they were making love. Miss Clifford was troubled, perplexed, to make out her companion's character, for she certainly expected nothing from a man familiarly called Ned Hayward, and more especially from a particular friend of her uncle's, but a gay, rattling, good-humoured scapegrace, at the best; yet, in order to gain her full attention, and withdraw her thoughts from a subject which he saw annoyed her, Captain Hayward put off for the time his usual careless, rapid manner, and spoke with so much feeling and good taste, and, what is more, good sense also, upon all the many topics upon which their conversation ran—he showed her that he had read so much, and thought so much, and felt so much—that she became convinced before he had done of the complete fallacy of all her preconceived notions of his disposition. Such a change of opinion is always very favourable to a man with a woman; for they are such generous creatures, those women, that if they find they have done one injustice, they are sure to go to the opposite extreme, and give us credit for more than is our due.

Ned Hayward's puzzle was of a different kind, but it proceeded from the same source—namely, an erroneous preconception. He saw that Mary Clifford was embarrassed whenever the subject of the attack upon their carriage was mentioned, that she changed colour, not from red to white, as would have been the case had terror had ought to do with it, but from white to red, which is generally a change produced by other emotions. He therefore set it down as a certain fact, that the fair lady's heart was a little engaged in the transaction; and yet, as they went on talking in that same low voice, she twice returned to the subject herself, not without some degree of embarrassment, it is true, but still as if she wished to say more, and Ned Hayward thought, with some degree of pique, "Well, my pretty friend, I am not quite old enough to be made a confidant of yet."

At length, just as the dessert was being put upon the table, troublesome Sir John Slingsby harked back upon the subject, asking Mr. Beauchamp if he thought he could swear to any of the persons concerned; and, taking advantage of a quick and somewhat loud conversation which went on between those two gentlemen and Dr. Miles, Miss Clifford suddenly broke through what she was talking of with her companion on the right, and said, earnestly, but still almost in a whisper, "Captain Hayward, you rendered me

a very great service last night, for which I shall ever feel grateful, and it will add immensely to the favour, if you can prevent my uncle from pursuing the matter in the manner he seems inclined to do. Particular circumstances, which I may some time have an opportunity of explaining, would render it most painful to me to have the scandalous outrage which was committed upon us last night dragged into a court of justice; indeed, I think it would half kill me, especially if I had to give evidence, as I suppose would be the case."

"I will do my best," answered Ned Hayward, "but you must not be angry or surprised at any means I may take for that purpose. I could act better, indeed, if I knew the circumstances."

"All I can say at present," answered the young lady, in a low tone, "is, that this was not a case of robbery, as you all seem to suppose."

The colour mounted into her cheek as she spoke, and she added, quickly, "I cannot reproach myself with anything in the affair, Captain Hayward, although I have scrutinised my own conduct severely; but yet at the same time, even to have my name talked of in connection with such a proceeding, and with such—such a person, would distress me more than I can describe. I will say more another time."

"In the meanwhile, I will do my best," replied the other; and instantly commenced a jesting attack upon Sir John Slingsby, which at once drew the baronet away from the subject. They had not got further, however, than a sharp shot and a rejoinder, when the roll of wheels was heard driving up to the door, and a minute or two after, one of the servants entered, announcing that Mr. Wittingham was in the library.

"Let him stay—let him stay!" said Sir John Slingsby; "he'll have an opportunity there of improving his mind. What, what do you say?" he continued, as the man whispered something over his shoulder; "we've neither secrets of state nor high treason here,—speak out."

"Please you, Sir John, two of Mr. Wittingham's men have brought up Stephen Gimlet, whom they call Wolf, in custody. I have kept him in the hall."

"Hang it!" cried Ned Hayward, "my little boy's father. I hope he has not been doing any serious mischief!"

"I don't think it—I don't think it," said Dr. Miles, eagerly; "the man has a heart and a conscience—a little warped, it is true, but still sound—sound, I think—I will go and speak to him."

"Hang him, he steals my pheasants!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby.

"Then why don't you put him to keep them, colonel?" asked Ned Hayward. "He would make a capital keeper, I am sure. Set a thief to catch a thief, Sir John."

"Not a bad idea, Ned," answered the baronet. "Stay, stay, doctor, he's not condemned yet, and so does not want the parson. We had better talk to old Wittingham first. We'll have him in and fuddle him. Give my compliments to Mr. Wittingham, Matthews, and beg him to walk in. You need not go, Harriet. He's quite a lady's man."

But Mrs. Clifford rose, not at all anxious to witness the process of fuddling a magistrate, and withdrew with her daughter and her niece.

CHAPTER XII.

"Ah! Wittingham! Wittingham!" cried the baronet, stretching forth his hand, without rising, as the servant introduced the worthy magistrate, "is that you, my old buck? If you haven't come in pudding-time, you have come in wine-time, and will get what so few men get in life—your dessert. Sit down and pledge me, old fellow. What shall it be in? Here's port that was bottled when I came of age, so you may judge that it is good old stuff! Maderia that has made more voyages than Cook, Comet Claret of 1811, and a bottle of Burgundy that smells under my nose like oil of violets."

"Why, Sir John," replied Mr. Wittingham, taking the seat just left vacant by Mrs. Clifford, and very well pleased with so familiar a reception, when he expected quite the reverse; for to say the truth, although some circumstances had happened to make him resolve upon taking the bull by the horns, and visiting the old lion of Tarningham Park in his den, it was, nevertheless, with great pain and difficulty that he had screwed his courage to the sticking-point,—“why, Sir John, I come upon business, and it is better to transact affairs of importance with a clear head.”

"Pooh, nonsense!" exclaimed the baronet; "no man ever did business well without being half-drunk. Look at my old friend Pitt, poor fellow! and Charley Fox, too, Sir William Scott, and Dundas, and all of them; not a set of jollier toppers in the world than they were, and are still—what are left of them. Well, here's health to the living, and peace to the dead!—Burgundy, eh?" and he filled a glass for Mr. Wittingham to the brim.

The worthy magistrate took it, and, drinking Sir John Slingsby's toast, was about to proceed to business, when the baronet again interrupted him, saying, "Let me introduce you to my friends, Wittingham; there's no fun in drinking with men you don't know. With Dr. Miles you are acquainted: this is my friend, Mr. Beauchamp, and this my friend, Captain Hayward. Gentlemen both, know, esteem, and admire Henry Wittingham, Esq., one of the ornaments of the bench of the county of —, one of the trustees of the turnpike roads, a very active magistrate, and a very honest man. Sink the shop, Witty," he continued, in a friendly whisper to his companion; for Sir John seldom, if ever, allowed Mr. Wittingham to escape without some allusion to his previous occupations, which naturally made that gentleman hate him mortally. "But before we have another glass, my good friend, I must make you acquainted with these gentlemen's high qualities," proceeded the baronet. "Here's Ned Hayward, the most deadly shot in Europe, whether with pistol, rifle, or fowling-piece; nothing escapes him, from the human form divine down to a cock-sparrow. The best angler in England, too; would throw a fly into a teaspoon at fifty yards distance. He has come down for an interminable number of months to catch my trout, kill my game, and drink my Claret. Then, there is my friend Mr. Beauchamp,—more sentimentally given, a very learned man and profound, loves poetry and solitary walks, and is somewhat for musing melancholy made; but is a good hand at a trigger, too, I can tell you—a light finger, and a steady aim; ha! Beauchamp?" and the baronet winked his eye and laughed.

Beauchamp smiled good-humouredly, and, in order to change the course of the conversation, which was not exactly what suited him, he said that he had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with Mr. Wittingham.

Ned Hayward, however, somewhat to Beauchamp's surprise, seemed determined to encourage their host in his light and rattling talk; and taking the latter up where Sir John had left it, he said, "Oh, dear, yes, I dare say we shall have capital sport down here. The old work of the 40th, Sir John; clearing all the fences, galloping over all the turnips, riding down the young wheat, forgetting the limits of the manor, letting the beasts out of the pound, making a collection of knockers and bell-pulls, fighting the young men, and making love to the young women—Mr. Wittingham, the wine stands with you."

Mr. Wittingham filled his glass, and drank, saying, with

a grave and somewhat alarmed air, "I don't think that would exactly do in this county, sir; the magistrates are rather strict here."

"The devil they are!" said Ned Hayward, with a good deal of emphasis, the meaning of which Mr. Wittingham could not well help understanding; but the next moment the young gentleman went on: "But who cares a pin for magistrates, Mr. Wittingham? They're nothing but a parcel of old women."

"Hallo, hallo, Ned!" cried Sir John, "you forget in whose presence you are speaking; reverence the bench, young man—reverence the bench; and if you can't do that, reverence the colonel."

"Oh, you're a great exception to the general rule," replied Captain Hayward; "but what I say is true, nevertheless; and as I like to define my positions, I will give you a lexicographical description of the magistrates. They should be called in any dictionary, a body of men selected from the most ignorant of the people, for the mal-administration of good laws."

"Bravo, bravo!" shouted Sir John Slingsby, roaring with laughter; and even Dr. Miles nodded his head, with a grave smile, saying, "Too just a definition, indeed."

Mr. Wittingham looked confounded, but Sir John passed him the bottle, and for relief he again filled his glass and emptied it. Now, to men not quite sure of their position, there is nothing so completely overpowering as jest and merriment with a dash of sarcasm. In grave argument, where they have their own vanity for their backer, they will always venture to meet men both of superior abilities and superior station, whether in so doing they expose themselves or not; for in that case their notions are generally formed beforehand, and they are fully convinced that those notions are just; but in a combat of the wit, it requires to be a very ready man, and also to have all those habits of society which enable one to make the reply tart enough, with every semblance of courtesy. On the bench and in the justice-room, Mr. Wittingham would often venture to spar with Sir John Slingsby, and sometimes with a good deal of success; for although the baronet had much greater natural abilities and information, yet he had so many foibles and failings, and occasionally such a degree of perversity, that from time to time his adversary would get hold of a weak point, and drive him into a corner. It always ended, however, by Sir John coming off triumphant; for when he found that argument failed him, he had recourse to ridicule, and in two minutes would utterly con-

found his antagonist, and overwhelm him amidst peals of laughter.

In the present instance Mr. Wittingham found that Sir John was in one of his jocular moods, and scarcely dared to say a word, lest he should bring some of his hard jests upon his head, especially when the baronet had the strong support which Ned Hayward seemed capable of giving. He was, therefore, anxious to proceed to the business that brought him as speedily as possible; and giving up the defence of the magistracy, after a momentary pause, he said, "Really, Sir John, as I must get home soon——"

"Not till you have finished your bottle, man," cried Sir John Slingsby, pushing the Burgundy to him; "whoever comes to see me after dinner must fight me or drink a bottle with me; so here's to your health, Witty—a bumper, a bumper, and no heel-taps."

The glasses at Sir John Slingsby's table might well be called wine-glasses, for they seldom had any other liquor in them; but, at the same time, in size they were not much less than those vessels which are named tumblers, I suppose from their being less given to tumbling than any other sort of glass. Mr. Wittingham had drank three already, besides the moderate portion which he had taken at his own dinner; but in order to get rid of the subject, he swallowed another of strong Burgundy, and then commenced again, saying, "Really, Sir John, we must go to business. We can sip your good wine while we are talking the affair over."

"Sip it!" exclaimed his host, "who ever heard of a man sipping such stuff as this? Nobody ever sips his wine but some lackadaisical, love-lorn swain, with a piece of Cheshire cheese before him, making verses all the time upon pouting lips and rounded hips, and sparkling eyes and fragrant sighs, and pearly teeth and balmy breath, and slender nose and cheek that glows, and all the O's! and all the I's! that ever were twisted into bad metre and bad sense; or else the reformed toper, who is afraid of exceeding the stint that his doctors have allowed him, and lingers out every drop with the memory of many a past carouse before his eyes. No, no, such wine as this is made to be swallowed at a mouthful, washing the lips with a flood of enjoyment, stimulating the tongue, spreading a glow over the palate, and cooling the tonsils and the throat only to inflame them again with fresh appetite for the following glass—sip it! why, hang it, Wittingham, it is to insult a good bottle of wine, and I trust that you may be

shot dead by a Champagne cork to teach you better manners."

"Well, then," cried Mr. Wittingham, stimulated to repartee by impatience, "I will say, Sir John, that we can swill your wine while we are talking of business."

"Ay, that's something like," cried Sir John Slingsby, not at all discomposed, "you shall swill the wine, and I will drink it: that will suit us both. Beauchamp we will let off, because he's puny, and Doctor Miles because he's reverend. Ned Hayward will do us justice, glass for glass, I'll answer for it. So another bumper, and then to business; but first we'll have lights, your worship, for it's growing dusky," and Sir John rose to ring the bell.

Scarcely, however, had he quitted his seat, when there was heard a loud report. One of the panes of glass in the window flew in shining splinters into the room, and a ball whistling through, passed close to the head of Mr. Wittingham, knocked off his wig, and lodged in the eye of a Cupid who was playing with his mother in a large picture on the other side of the room.

"Zounds!" cried Sir John Slingsby.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HIGH-SOUNDING oath from Sir John Slingsby passed unnoticed, for though every one had heard the shot, each person's attention was suddenly called to an object of his own. Ned Hayward sprung to the window, and looked out; Dr. Miles started up and turned towards Mr. Wittingham; and Beauchamp, who was sitting next to that gentleman, suddenly stretched out his hand, and caught him by the arm and shoulder, so as to break his fall to the ground, though not to stop it; for the worthy magistrate, with a low exclamation of horror, which reached no ear but one, pressed his hand upon his heart, and fell fainting to the ground, just as if the ball, which had entered the window, had found out the precise spot in his skin which had not been dipped in Styx. Nevertheless, when Sir John, and Mr. Beauchamp, and Dr. Miles, lifted him up off the floor, and seated him on his chair again—though they undoubtedly expected to find one of those small holes which I should call a life-door, were it not that they never let life in, if they often let life out—no wound of any kind was to be perceived, except in the wig. Lights were brought; servants hurried in and out; cold water was sprinkled on the old gentleman's face; the butler recommended sal-

volatile; Sir John Slingsby tried brandy; and, at length, Mr. Wittingham was brought to himself. Every one was busy about him but Ned Hayward; and as Ned was a very charitable and benevolent man, it may be necessary to say why he bestowed no care or attention on Mr. Wittingham. The fact was, that he did not know anything was the matter with him; for Ned Hayward was no longer in the room. The window was open, indeed, and Ned Hayward had jumped out.

To return to Mr. Wittingham, however. no sooner did he recover breath enough to articulate, than he declared, in a low voice, he must go home.

"Why, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "you're not hurt—only frightened—devilish frightened, that's all; and you are still white about the gills, and fishy in the eyes. Come, come, finish your bottle, and get rid of that haddock-look before you go, or you may faint again in the carriage."

"I must go home," repeated Mr. Wittingham, in a dismal tone.

"Then what's to become of the business you came about?" inquired the baronet.

"I must leave it in your hands, Sir John," replied Mr. Wittingham, rising feebly; "I have no head for it to-night. It was about that notorious poacher, Gimlet, I came. The constables will tell you how I happened to have him apprehended; but I must go—I must go, I have no head for it."

"Though the bullet kept out, plenty of lead has got in, somehow or other," muttered Sir John Slingsby, as his fellow-magistrate tottered towards the door. But the baronet was not a bad-hearted man, and, taking compassion on Mr. Wittingham's state, he followed him with a large glass of Madeira, insisted upon his drinking it, and supported him under the right arm to the hall-door, where he delivered him over to the hands of the butler to put him safely into his carriage. While effecting all this, Sir John turned round and gazed upon the figure of Stephen Gimlet, and the two officers who had him in charge; and if his look was not peculiarly encouraging to the poacher, it certainly was much less so towards the constables. To say the truth, a constable was an animal towards which, for some reason or another, Sir John Slingsby entertained a great dislike. It is not impossible that his old roving propensities, and sundry encounters with the particular kind of officer which was now under his thumb, had impressed him with a distaste for the whole species; but, assuredly,

had he been called upon to give a Linnæan description of the creature, it would have been: "A two-legged beast of the species hound, made to be beaten by blackguards, and bullied by magistrates."

Waving his hand, therefore, with an air of dignity, over his extended white waistcoat, he said:—

"Bring him in," and, leading the way back to the dining-room, he seated himself in his great chair, supported on either side by decanters; and, while the constables were entering, and taking up a position before him, he pushed a bottle either way, to Dr. Miles and Mr. Beauchamp, saying, in as solemn a tone as if he were delivering sentence of death, "A bumper, gentlemen, for a toast—now Master Leathersides, why do you bring this man before me?"

"Why, please your worship's honour," replied the constable, "we apprehended him for poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and——"

"Halloah!" cried Sir John, "poaching in the streets of Tarningham! that's a queer place to set springs. Leather-sides, you're drunk."

"No, please your honour's worship, I ar'n't," whimpered the constable, who would at any time rather have been sent for a week to prison, than be brought up before Sir John Slingsby; "I said as how we apprehended him in the streets of Tarningham, not as he was a-poaching there."

"Then where was he poaching when you apprehended him?" demanded Sir John, half in fun, half in malice, and with a full determination of puzzling the constable.

"Can't say he was poaching anywhere just then," replied Mr. Leathersides.

"Then you'd no business to apprehend him," replied the baronet; "discharge the prisoner, and evacuate the room. Gentlemen, are you charged? The king, God bless him!" and he swallowed down his glass of wine, winking his eye to Beauchamp, at what he thought his good joke against the constables.

Mr. Leathersides, however, was impressed with a notion that he must do his duty, and that that duty was to remonstrate with Sir John Slingsby; therefore, after a portentous effort, he brought forth the following words:—

"But, Sir John, when we'd a got 'un, Mr. Wittingham said we were to keep 'un."

"Where's your warrant?" thundered Sir John.

"Can't say we've got one," said the other constable, for Mr. Leathersides was exhausted.

"If you apprehended him illegally," said Sir John

Slingsby, magisterially, "you detained him still more illegally. Leathersides, you're a fool. Mr. What's-your-name, you're an ass. You've both violated the law; and I've a great mind to fine you both—a bumper—so I will, by Jove! Come here and drink the king's health;" and Sir John laughed heartily while inflicting this very pleasant penalty, as they thought it, upon the two constables. But, resolved to carry the joke out, the baronet, as soon as the men had swallowed the wine, exclaimed in a pompous tone: "Stephen Gimlet, you are charged with poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and convicted on the sufficient testimony of two constables. Appear before the court to receive sentence. Prisoner, your sentence is this; that you be brought up to this table, and there to gulp down, at a single and uninterrupted draught, one glass of either of those two liquors called Port or Madeira, at the discretion of the court, to the health of our sovereign lord the king; and that, having so done, you shall be considered to have made full and ample satisfaction for the said offence."

"With all my heart, sir," said Ste Gimlet, taking the glass of wine which Sir John Slingsby offered him. "Here's to the king, God bless him! and may he give us many such magistrates as Sir John Slingsby."

"Sir, I've a great mind to fine you another bumper for adding to my toast," exclaimed the baronet; and then, waving his hand to the constables, he continued: "Be off! The prisoner is discharged: you've nothing more to do with him—stay here, Master Gimlet, I've something to say to you;" and when the door was shut, he continued, with a very remarkable change of voice and manner: "Now, my good friend, I wish to give you a little bit of warning. As I am Lord of the Manor for many miles round the place where you live, the game you have taken must be mine, and, therefore, I have thought myself justified in treating the matter lightly, and making a joke of it. You may judge, however, from this, that I speak disinterestedly, and as your friend, when I point out to you, that if you follow the course you are now pursuing, it will inevitably lead you on to greater offences. It will deprave your mind, teach you to think wrong right, to resist by violence the assertion of the law, and, perhaps, in the end, bring you to the awful crime of murder, which, whether it be punished in this world or not, is sure to meet its retribution hereafter."

"Upon my life and soul, Sir John," said Ste Gimlet, earnestly, "I will never touch a head of game of yours again."

"Nor any one else's, I hope," answered Sir John Slingsby; "you are an ingenious fellow, I have heard, and can gain your bread by better means."

"How?" inquired the man, emphatically. But the moment after, he added, "I will try, at all events. This very morning, I was thinking I would make a change, and endeavour to live like other people; but then I fancied it would be of no use. First, people would not employ me, and I feared to try them. Next, I feared myself; for I have led a wild rambling kind of life, and have got to love it better than any other. If there were a chance of men treating me kindly, and giving me encouragement, it might answer; but if I found all faces looking cold on me, and all hearts turned away from me—though perhaps I have deserved it—I am afraid I should just fall back into my old ways again. However, I will try—I will try for the child's sake, though it will be a hard struggle at first, I am sure."

Sir John Slingsby laid his finger upon his temple, and thought for a moment. He had been serious for a long while—fully five minutes—and he had some difficulty in keeping up his grave demeanour; but that was not all: some words which Ned Hayward had let fall almost at random, suggested a plan to his mind which he hesitated whether he should adopt or not. Perhaps—though he was a kind-hearted man, as we have seen and said before—he might have rejected it, had it not been for its oddity; but it was an odd plan, and one that jumped with his peculiar humour. He was fond of doing all sorts of things that other men would not do, simply because they would not—of trying experiments they dared not try—of setting at defiance everything which had only custom and convention for its basis; and therefore, after an instant's meditation, given to the consideration of whether people would suppose he was actuated by benevolence or eccentricity (he would not have had them think he did an odd thing from benevolence for the world), he went on as the whim prompted to reply to Stephen Gimlet's last words, mingling a high degree of delicacy of feeling with his vagaries in the strangest manner possible, as the reader will see.

"Well, Ste," he said, "perhaps we may make it less of a struggle than you think. I'll tell you what, my fine fellow; you're very fond of game—a little too fond, perhaps. Now, my friend, Ned Hayward—that's to say, Captain Hayward—where the deuce he has gone to I don't know!—run after the clumsy fellow, I suppose, who fired through

the window and missed the deer too, I'll be bound (it must have been Conolly, the under-keeper—nobody but Conolly would have thought of firing right towards the window)—but as I was saying, my friend, Ned Hayward, said just now that you'd make a capital keeper. What do you think of it, Gimlet? Wouldn't it do?"

"Not under Mr. Hearne, sir," answered Ste Gimlet. "We've had too many squabbles together;" and he shook his head.

"No, no, that would never do," replied Sir John, laughing; "you'd soon have your charges in each other's gizzards. But you know Denman died a week ago, over at the Trottington Hall manor, on t'other side of the common—you know it, you dog—you know it well enough, I can see by the twinkling of your eye! I dare say you have looked into every nest on the manor, since the poor fellow was himself bagged by the grim sportsman. Well, but as I was saying, there's the cottage empty and eighteen shillings a-week, and you and Hearne can work against each other, and see which will give us the best day's sport, at the end of the year. What do you say, Gimlet? you can go and take possession of the cottage this very night; I don't want it to stand empty an hour longer."

"Thank you, a thousand times, Sir John!" said the man, heartily; "you are a kind gentleman indeed, but I must go up to my own place first. There's my little boy, you know. Poor little man, I dare say he has cried his heart out."

"Pooh, nonsense—not a bit!" said the baronet, "I'll take care of all that. I'll send up, and have him fetched."

The man smiled and shook his head, saying, "He would not come with a stranger."

"What will you bet?" cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "I'll bet you a guinea against your last ferret, that he'll come directly. Here, Matthew—Moore—Harrison," he continued, first ringing the bell, and then opening the door to call—"some of you d—d fellows run up, and bring Ste Gimlet's little boy. Tell him, his daddy's here;" and Sir John Slingsby, sat down and laughed prodigiously, adding, every now and then, "I'll take any man five guineas of it that he comes."

There is an exceedingly good old English expression, which smart people have of late years banished from polite prose, but which I shall beg leave to make use of here. Sir John Slingsby, then, was known to be a comical fellow. Stephen Gimlet was well aware that such was the case; and though he thought the joke was a somewhat extra-

vagant one, to send a man-servant up to the moor at that hour of the evening, to fetch down his little boy, yet still he thought it a joke. His only anxiety, however, was to prevent its being carried too far, and, therefore, after twirling his hat about for a minute in silence, he said:—

"Well, Sir John, perhaps if he's told I am here, he may come; but now I recollect, I locked the door; and besides, there are all my things to be fetched down; so if you will be kind enough to give me till to-morrow, sir, I will accept your bounty with a thankful heart, and do my best to deserve it—and I am sure I am most grateful to the gentleman who first spoke of such a thing. I am, indeed," he added, with some degree of hesitation, and cheek rather reddened; for while Sir John was still laughing heartily, he saw that Mr. Beauchamp's fine lustrous eyes were fixed upon him with a look of deep interest, and that Doctor Miles was blowing his nose violently, while his eyelids grew rather red.

"I don't doubt it in the least, Ste," said Sir John; "Ned Hayward is a very good fellow—a capital fellow—you owe him a great deal, I can tell you. There! there!" he continued, as the door opened to give admission to the servant, "I told you he would come—didn't I tell you? There he is, you see!"

Stephen Gimlet gazed for an instant in silent astonishment when he beheld the boy in the butler's arms, wrapped warmly up in the housekeeper's shawl; for, at Sir John's indisputable commands, they had taken him from his bed. He was confounded: he was as one thunder-struck; but the moment after, the child, recovering from the first dazzling effect of the light, held out his little hands to his father with a cry of delight, exclaiming, "There's my daddy—there's my daddy!" and the poacher sprang forward, and caught him to his heart.

Sir John Slingsby was himself overset by what he had done: the tears started in his eyes; but still he laughed louder than ever; out-trumpeted Doctor Miles with blowing his nose, wiped away the tears with the back of his hand, put on his spectacles to hide them, and then looked over the spectacles to see Ste Gimlet and his boy.

The child was nestling on his father's breast and prattling to him; but in a moment the man started and turned pale, exclaiming, "Fire!—the place burnt! What in heaven's name does he mean?"

"There, my good man!" cried Dr. Miles, coming forward and making the man sit down, seeing that he looked as ghastly as the dead, with strong emotion. "Don't be

alarmed, Stephen. Don't be agitated. Lift up the voice of praise and thanksgiving to God, for a great mercy shown you this day, not alone in saving your child from a terrible death, but in having sent you a warning with a most lenient hand, which will assuredly make you a better man for all your future days. Lift up the voice of praise, I say, from the bottom of your heart."

"I do, indeed!" cried the poacher; "I do, indeed!" and bending down his head upon the boy's neck, he wept. "But how did it happen?—how could it happen?" he continued, after a while, "and how, how was he saved?"

"Why, Ned Hayward saved him, to be sure," cried the baronet. "Gallant Ned Hayward—who but he? He saw the place burning from the top of the barrow, man, rushed in, burnt himself, and brought out the boy."

"God bless him! God bless him!" cried the father. "But the fire," he added, "how could the place take fire?"

"That nasty cross man set it on fire, daddy, I'm sure," said the boy; "the man that was there this morning. He came when you were away, and he wouldn't answer when I call'd, and I saw him go away, through the peep-hole, with a lighted stick in his mouth. I didn't do it, indeed, daddy."

A glimpse of the truth presented itself to Stephen Gimlet's mind; and though he said nothing, he clenched one hand tight, so tight that the print of the nails remained in the palm; but then his thoughts turned to other things, and, rising up out of the chair in which Doctor Miles had placed him, he turned to Sir John Slingsby, and said, "Oh, sir, I wish I could say how much I thank you!"

"There, there, Stephen," replied the baronet, waving his hand kindly, "no more about it. You have lost one house and you have got another; you have given up one trade and taken a better. Your boy is safe and well; so, as the good doctor says, praise God for all. Take another glass of wine, and when you have talked a minute with the little man, give him back to the housekeeper. He shall be well taken care of till you are settled, and in the meantime, you can go down to the Marquis of Granby, in the village, and make yourself comfortable till to-morrow.—— Hang me if I drink any more wine to-night. All this is as good as a bottle;" and Sir John rose to join the ladies. The other two gentlemen very willingly followed his example; but before they went, Beauchamp, who had had his pocket-book in his hand for a minute or two, took a very thin piece of paper out of it, and went round to Stephen Gimlet.

"You have lost all your furniture, I am afraid," he said, in a low voice; "there is something to supply its place with more."

"Lord bless you, sir! what was my furniture worth!" said the poacher, looking at the note in his hand, with a melancholy smile; but by that time Beauchamp was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I WONDER where the deuce Ned Hayward can be gone!" was the exclamation of Sir John Slingsby, about ten o'clock at night, when he found that his young guest did not re-appear; and so do I wonder, and perhaps so does the reader, too. It will therefore be expedient, in order to satisfy all parties, to leave the good people at Tarningham Park, and pursue our friend at once, for we have no time to spare, if we would catch him. He is a desperate hard rider when there is any object in view, and he certainly left the park on horseshack.

When last we saw him, the hour was about half-past seven or a quarter to eight; night was beginning to fall, and without doing anything figurative in regard to the evening—without comparing the retiring rays of light to the retreat of a defeated army, or the changing colour of the sky to the contents of a London milk-maid's pail under the influence of the pump—we may be permitted to say that the heavens were getting very gray; the rose and the purple had waned, and night, heavy night, was pouring like a deluge through the air. Nevertheless, the night was fine, a star or two shone out, and the moment Ned Hayward sprang to the window through which the ball had come, he saw a figure hurrying away through the trees, at the distance of about three hundred yards. They were fine old trees, with no underwood—English park trees, wide apart, far-spreading, gigantic; and Ned Hayward paused an instant to gaze, after he had jumped out of the window, and then took to his heels, and ran on as fast as a pair of long, strong, well-practised legs would carry him. There was turf below him, and his feet fell lightly, but he had not gained more than fifty yards upon the figure, when he saw through the bolls another figure, not human but equine. For a short distance, the person he pursued did not seem aware that he had a follower; but before the time arrived when the horse became apparent, some indications seemed to reach his ear, and if Ned Hayward ran quick, the other seemed to run nearly as fast. When the young

gentleman was within a hundred yards of him, however, the man was upon the horse's back and galloping away.

Ned Hayward stopped, and followed him with his eyes, marking the course he took, as far as the light would permit. He then listened, and heard the noise of the horse's feet distinctly beating the ground in one direction. The next moment, the sounds became confused with others, as if another horse were near, and turning round to the road which led from the gate on the side of Tarningham, the young officer saw a mounted man coming slowly up towards the house.

"By Jove, this is lucky!" said Ned Hayward, as he recollected having heard Sir John Slingsby tell a groom to carry a note to Mr. Wharton, the lawyer. And running down to the road as fast as possible, he stopped the servant, and bade him dismount, and let him have the horse immediately.

The groom recognised his master's guest, but he had some hesitation, and began his reply with a "Please, sir—" But Ned cut him short at once, in a very authoritative tone; and in two minutes he was in the saddle. He paused not an instant to think, for calculation was a very rapid process with him, and, during his morning's rambles, he had marked, with a soldier's eye, all the bearings and capabilities of the park and the ground round about it. The result of his combinations was thus expressed upon the mental tablet, or nearly thus:—

"The fellow cannot get out by the way he has taken; for there is no gate, and the park-paling is planted at the top of the high bank, so that no man in England dare leap it. He must take to the right or left. On the left, he will be checked by the river and the thick copse, which would bring him round close to the house again. He will, therefore, take to the right, and pass the gates on the top of the hill. He must come down half-way to the outer gates, however, before he can get out of the lane; and I shall not be much behind him."

He accordingly rode straight to the gates on the Tarningham side, passed them, turned sharp to the left, galloped up the sandy lane under the park wall, and blessed his stars as he saw the edge of the moon beginning to show itself in the east.

"Hang me, if I give up the chase till I have run him down!" said Ned Hayward; but when a man sets out hunting a fox with such a determination, he never knows how far the fox or the determination may lead him. Away he went, however, like a shot. The horse was a strong,

well-built cob, of about fourteen hands three, which had been accustomed to bear the great bulk and heavy riding of Sir John Slingsby to cover; and it sprang out under the lighter weight and better balance of the younger man as if it had a feather on its back. Up the hill they went, all gathered together, like a woolpack; an easy hand, an easy seat, and an exact poise, made the rider seem to the beast not half his real weight; and, in two minutes, Ned Hayward's quick ear caught the sound of other hoofs besides those underneath him. "I shall have him now!" he said; but suddenly the sounds became fainter. Three springs more, and he had the horseman before him, but at a hundred and fifty yards' distance, going over the moor. There was a fence and ditch on the right hand, and Ned Hayward pushed his horse at them. The good little beast rose gallantly by the moonlight,—but there was a ditch on the other side also, which neither saw. He cleared it with his fore-feet, but his hind went in, and over he came sprawling. Neither rider nor beast were hurt, and Ned Hayward picked him up in a minute, and away again.

The fugitive had gained ground, nevertheless, and was shooting off like a falling star; but the moonlight was now bright, lying in long misty lines upon the moor. A few rapid steps brought them to the sandy road, and on—on they dashed, as if for life. On, however, dashed the other horseman likewise. He knew the ground well—his horse was good: he really rode for life. It was as even a race as ever was seen. The wide moor extended for miles, every tree and bush was visible, and even the distant belts of planting, where the common ended on the right, could be seen lying black and heavy against the moonlight sky; but yet there was a darkness over the ground which showed that it was not day; and still, as he urged the willing beast forward, Ned Hayward kept a ready hand upon the bridle, in case of need. Soon he thought he gained upon the other, but then he saw him turn from the sandy road, and take over the turf to the left. Ned Hayward ran across, and pressed hard the beast's sides. "On, on they went; but the next instant the ground seemed darker before him, and the pursuer checked up his horse suddenly upon the very edge of a deep pit, while the other rode on unobstructed on the further side.

Not more than a moment was lost or gained, however, for turning quickly round the edge of the pit, though keeping a sharper eye upon the ground than before, Ned Hayward still followed a diagonal course, which saved him as much of the distance between him and the fugitive as

he had lost by the temporary check. When he, too, had got to the other side of the pit, the space between them was about the same that it had been at first, but the ground sloped gently downward, and then spread out in a perfect flat with neither trees nor bushes, although some thick rushy spots assumed, here and there, the appearance of bunches of bramble or bilberry, but afforded no interruption to the horses' speed, and on they went, helter skelter, over the moor, as if the great enemy were behind them.

In a few minutes a light was visible on the right, and Ned Hayward said to himself, "He is making for some house;" but the next instant the light moved, flitting along from spot to spot, with a blue, wavering, uncertain flame, and with a low laugh, the young gentleman muttered, "A will-o'-the-wi-p. That shan't lead me astray this time, at least."

On he dashed, keeping the horseman before him; but ere he had passed the meteor a hundred yards, he felt the pace of his horse uneasy, the ground seemed to quiver and shake under his rapid footfalls, and a plashy sound was heard, as if the hoofs sank into a wet and marshy soil.

"A shaking bog, upon my life," said Ned Hayward, "but as he has gone over it, so can I."

With his horse's head held tightly up, his heels into his sides, the bridle shaken every minute to give him courage, and a loud "Tally ho!" as if he were in sight of a fox, on went Ned Hayward, with the water splashing up around him till the hoofs fell upon firmer ground, and a slight slope upwards caught the moonlight, and showed the fugitive scampering away with a turn to the right.

"Hoiks, hoiks! halloo!" cried Ned Hayward, applying the flat of his hand to the horse's flank, and, as if inspired by the ardour of the chase, the brave little beast redoubled its efforts, and strained up the hill after the larger horse, gaining perceptibly upon it.

Clear and full in the moonlight the dark figure came out from the sky as he cleared the edge of the hill, and in two seconds, or not much more, Ned Hayward gained the same point.

The figure was no longer visible. It had disappeared as if by magic; horse and rider were gone together, and all that could be seen was the gentle slope downward that lay at the horse's feet, a darkish spot beyond, which the moon's rays did not reach, and then the moor extending for about a couple of miles further, marked in its undulations by strong light and shade.

"Why, what the devil is this?" exclaimed Ned Hayward; but though he sometimes indulged in an exclamation

tion, he never let astonishment stop him, and seeing that if the figure had taken a course to the right or left he must have caught sight of it, he rode straight at the dark spot in front, and found that it consisted of one of the large pits, with which the moor was spotted, filled to the very top of the banks with low stunted oaks, ashes, and birch trees.

"Earthed him! earthed him!" said Ned Hayward, as he looked round, but he made no further observation, and soon perceived the sandy cart-road which the man must have taken to descend into the pit.

The young gentleman was now a little puzzled; the natural pertinacity and impetuosity of his disposition would have led him to plunge in after the object of his chase, like a terrier dog after a badger, but then he saw that by so doing, the man, who knew the ground apparently much better than he did, would have the opportunity of doubling upon him and escaping his pursuit, while he was losing himself among the trees and paths. Rapid in all his calculations, and seeing that the extent of the hollow was not very great, so that by the aid of the moonlight, any figure which issued forth would become visible to him as long as he remained above, Ned Hayward trotted round the edge of the pit to make himself perfectly sure that there was no small path or break in the banks, by which the object he had lodged in the bushes beneath him might effect its flight without his perceiving it. Having ascertained this fact, he took up his position on the highest ground near, that he might command the whole scene round, and then dismounting, led his horse up and down to cool it gradually, saying to himself, "I will stop here all night rather than lose him. Some persons must come by in the morning, who will help me to beat the bushes."

Ned Hayward concluded his reflections, however, with a sentence which seemed to have very little connection with them.

"She's an exceedingly pretty girl," he said, "and seems to be as amiable as she is pretty, but I can't let that stop me."

I do not at all understand what he meant, but perhaps the reader may find some sense in it. But while he was reflecting on pretty girls, and combining them in the oddest way possible with his hunt after a man who had fired a shot into the window of Tarningham House, an obtrusive recollection crossed his mind that moons will go down, and that then wide open moors with many a shaking bog and pitfall were not the most lustrous and well-lighted places upon earth, which remembrance or reflection puzzled him exceedingly. Though we have never set up

Ned Hayward for a conjuror, he was an exceedingly clever, dashing, and amiable person; but he was far from being either a magician or an astronomer, and not having an almanack in his pocket, nor being able to read it if he had, he was not at all aware of the hour at which the moon went down. He saw, indeed, that she had already passed her prime, and was verging towards decline; and it was with a very unpleasant sensation that he thought, "Hang her old untidy horns, she will be gone before the day breaks, and a pleasant dark place it will be when she no longer gives me light. I will stop and watch, however, but I must change my tactics, and hide under the hill. Perhaps he may think I am gone, and come out with fresh courage. The young blackguard! it would be a good turn to all the world to hang him, if it is but to prevent him marrying such a nice girl as that, who is a great deal too good for him. She won't thank me, however, for my pains."

This thought, somehow or other, was not pleasant to our friend Ned Hayward, and, indeed, like most of us, in many even of the ordinary circumstances of life, he was affected by very different emotions. Why it was, or wherefore, he could not tell, but he had been seized with a strong inclination to hang, or otherwise dispose of, any gentleman whom he could suspect of being a favoured lover of Mary Clifford; and yet, on the other hand, he had every disposition in the world to oblige Mary Clifford himself. These two objects seemed incompatible, but there is a passion in the world which has a strange knack of trying to overcome impossibilities, and sometimes succeeds, too—at least, in overcoming those things which fathers and mothers, relations, guardians, and friends have pronounced to be insurmountable. At all events, Ned Hayward made up his mind that it was his duty not to abandon his pursuit so long as there was a chance of its being successful, and, consequently, he drew his horse a little further from the edge of the pit, as soon as he had considered the peculiar circumstances of Mistress Moon, and endeavoured to keep out of sight as far as possible, while he himself watched eagerly, with nothing but his head as far as the eyes above the edge of the acclivity.

Fancy is a wonderful thing, and it has been accounted for some people as good as physic. I should say it was better for most men; but yet, taken in too large doses, it is dangerous, very dangerous. Now, Ned Hayward had, that night, taken too large a dose, and the effect was this; he imagined he was perfectly well acquainted with the figure, person, and appearance of the horseman whom he

had hunted from under the walls of Tarningham-park to the spot where he then stood with his horse's bridle over his arm. He could have sworn to him!—very lucky it was that nobody called upon him to do so, as he found out within a quarter of an hour afterwards. Fancy painted his face and his figure, and a tremendous black eye, and a bruised cut down the side of his nose. Now, as the man lay there quietly ensconced in the pit, his face was very different, his figure was not at all the same, and no black eye, no bruised cut, gave evidence of the scuffle which had taken place two nights before. It was, in fact, quite a different person, and all the young gentleman's calculations were wrong together. It is a very happy thing indeed for a man in the wrong, when he acts in the same manner as he would if he were right. His doing so, it is true, sometimes proceeds from good sense, sometimes from good feeling, sometimes from fortunate circumstances, but, at all events, such was Ned Hayward's case in the present instance, for he had made up his mind to remain upon the watch, and he would have watched as zealously and only a little more pleasantly, if he had known perfectly well who the man was, instead of mistaking him for another. When he had remained about seven minutes and a half, however—I cannot speak to a few seconds more or less, and a slight mistake will make no great difference, as the first heat was over, and our friends were only taking breathing time—but when he had remained for about seven minutes and a half, his horse started at something behind him, and when the young gentleman turned round, he perceived a long shadow cross the space of moonlight on the common, showing that some living object was moving in a slanting direction between him and the south-western side of the sky. The first question he asked himself was naturally, who he could be, and the first answer that suggested itself was, "Perhaps one of this fellow's comrades."

Two to one, indeed, were not odds that at all daunted our young friend; and turning quite round, for an instant he looked at the figure as it came down, and then directed his eyes towards the edge of the pit again. He kept a sharp watch upon the approaching party, however, and though the step upon the soft turf made no great sound, his eyes were suddenly brought round upon the visitor of his solitary watch, when about ten yards still remained between them. The moon now served our good friend as well as if he had been a lover, showing him distinctly the face, features, and figure of the person before him, and he instantly exclaimed,—

"Ah, Stephen, this is lucky! What brought you here?"

"Why, sir," answered the man, "this is part of my beat, and as soon as I had got some supper down at the village, as it is not fair to take a gentleman's money without doing something for it, and as I am rather accustomed to a walk on a moonlight night, I thought I might as well just come out to see that all is safe. I can guess what brought you here, for Ned, the groom, told me you had taken his horse and were off like a shot."

"Hush!" said Ned Hayward; "don't speak so loud, my good fellow; I have earthed him amongst those trees in the pit there, but I could not dig him out, for I was afraid he would escape one way while I was hunting him the other."

"Ah! ah! you have got him, then?" said Gimlet; "then, that's a piece of luck. If he swings it will be no bad job; a bloody-minded scoundrel!"

Ned Hayward was somewhat surprised to hear his friend Wolf qualify by so unsavoury an epithet, a gentleman, whose friend and companion he had very lately been. The young officer, however, knew a good deal of the world and the world's ways, and he was not at all inclined to honour the ci-devant poacher for so sudden a change of opinion. His first thought was, this man must be a scoundrel at heart, after all, to abuse a man whom he has been consorting with in this manner, without any motive for so doing, except the simple fact of a change in his own avocations. If he thought young Wittingham a very respectable person two or three hours ago, when he himself was only Wolf the poacher, I do not understand why he should judge him a bloody-minded villain, now that he himself has become Stephen Gimlet, second keeper to Sir John Slingsby. This does not look like honesty.

A second thought, however, upon all he had seen of the man's character, the frankness, the hardihood, even the dogged determination he had shown, induced Captain Hayward to say to himself, "The fellow can't know who it is;" and as thought is a very rapid thing, he replied with a perceptible pause, "Yes, I have got him, safe and sure, and if you'll help he cannot get away. You guess who he is, I dare say, Stephen?"

"O, to be sure, sir," answered Gimlet; "it is that young scoundrel, Harry Wittingham. Bad's the crow and bad's the egg," he continued, without knowing he was using a Greek proverb; "I suppose it can be no one else; for I heard from the old housekeeper down in the town, that he swore like fury that he would have vengeance on his father if he laid the information against him before Sir John."

"Humph!" said Ned Hayward; "but then," he thought, "I am rather hard upon the man, too. The idea of any one in cold blood firing a shot at his own father is certainly enough to rouse the indignation and disgust even of men who would wink at, or take part in lesser crimes to which they are more accustomed. Come, Stephen," he continued aloud, "now you are here, we may do better than I could alone. Let us see what is to be done."

"Oh, we'll soon manage it, sir," answered Wolf. "I know every bit of the pit well enough; there is but one place he can go to with his horse, and but one road up the bank. He can round the inside of the pit two ways, sure enough, but what we had best do is, to go in till we can see what he is about, and then have a rush upon him together or separate, or cut him off either way."

Captain Hayward agreed in this view of the case, and after a few more words of consultation, the horse was fastened to a scraggy hawthorn tree, and stooping down as low as possible, to conceal their approach, Captain Hayward and his companion advanced along the cart-road down into the pit. The moment after they began to descend, the bank on the right cast a shadow over them, which favoured their operations; and Gimlet, taking the lead, crept silently along a path which had once served for the waggons that carried the sand out of the pit, but was now overgrown with grass, and hemmed in with bushes, shrubs, and trees of forty or fifty years' growth. No moonlight penetrated there, and all was dark, gloomy, and intricate. Now the path turned to the right, now to the left, then proceeded straightforward again, and then began to mount a little elevation in the surface, or floor, as the miners would call it, of the pit itself, still thickly surrounded by green shrubs, through which, however, the slanting beams of the moon were shining over the edge of the pit. Stephen Gimlet's steps became even still more quiet and cautious, and he whispered to Ned Hayward to walk lightly, for fear the fugitive should catch a sound of their approach, and make his escape. Each step occupied several seconds, so carefully was it planted; the slight rustling of the leaves, catching upon their clothes, and each movement of a branch, which pushed aside as they passed, was dashed back upon those behind, made them pause and listen, thinking that the object of their eager pursuit must have caught the sound as well as their own nearer ears. At length, Stephen Gimlet stopped, and putting back his hand, held his companion aloof for an instant, while he leaned forward, and brought his eyes close to a small hole be-

tween the branches. Then drawing Ned Hayward forward, he pointed in the same direction in which he had been looking, with his right finger, and immediately laid it upon his lips, as a token to be silent. Ned Hayward bent his head, and gazed through the aperture as his companion had done. The scene before him was a very peculiar one. In broken beams, filtered, as we may call it, by the green leaves and higher branches, the moonlight was streaming upon a small open space, where the ground rose into a swelling knoll, covered with green turf and moss. There was one small birch tree in the midst, and a hawthorn by its side, but all the rest was clear, and on the right hand could be seen, marked out by the yellow sand, the cart-road which led to the moor above. Standing close to the two little trees was a horse, a fine, strong, powerful bay, with a good deal of bone and sinew, long in the reach, but what is unusual in horses of that build, with a chine and shoulder like those of a wild boar. Close to the horse, with the bridle thrown over his arm, and apparently exceedingly busy upon something he was doing, stood a tall, powerful man, whose face, from the position in which he had placed himself, could not be seen; his back, in short, was towards Ned Hayward and his companion, but from under his left arm protruded part of the stock of a gun, which a moonbeam that fell upon it showed as plainly as the daylight could have done. From the position in which he held the fire-lock, it seemed to Ned Hayward as if he were attending to the priming, and the moment afterwards the click of the pan proved that the supposition was correct.

At the same time this sound met his ear, the young gentleman was drawn gently back by the hand of his companion, and the latter whispered, "That's Harry Wittingham's horse, I'd swear to him amongst a thousand; but that's not Henry Wittingham himself—of that I'm quite sure."

"I cannot see his face," answered Ned Hayward, in the same low tone, "but the figure seems to me very much the same."

"Hush! he's moving," said the man; "better let us go round and cut him off by either road, you to the right and I to the left—straight through that little path there—we shall have a shot for it, but we must not mind that—see, he is looking at his girths."

The man whom they spoke of had seemed perfectly unconscious of the presence of any such unwelcome visitors near him. His motions were all slow and indifferent, till

the last words had passed Stephen Gimlet's lips; then, however, he turned suddenly round, displaying a face that Captain Hayward did not at all recollect, and gazing direct to the spot where they stood, he raised his gun, already cocked, to his shoulder, and fired.

Fortunately, it so happened that Ned Hayward had taken one step in the direction which his companion had pointed out, otherwise the ball, with which the piece was charged, would have passed right through his breast. As it was, it grazed his left arm, leaving a slight flesh wound; and, seeing that they were discovered, both he and Stephen Gimlet dashed straight through the trees towards the object of their pursuit. He, in the meantime, had put his foot in the stirrup, and sprung upon his horse's back. One rushed at him on either side; but without a moment's consideration the man dashed at the poacher, brandishing the gun which he held in his hand like a club. As he came up, without giving ground an inch, Stephen clutched at his bridle, receiving a tremendous blow with the stock of his gun, and attempting to parry it with his left hand. The man raised his rein, however, at the same moment he struck the blow, and Stephen missed the bridle. He struck at him with his right, however, in hope of bringing him from his horse, and with such force and truth did he deliver his reply to the application of the gun-stock, that the man bent down to the horse's mane, but at the same time he struck his spurs deep into the beast's flanks, passed his opponent with a spring, and galloped up to the moor.

"I am away after him!" cried Ned Hayward, and darting along the road like lightning, he gained the common, unhooked his own horse from the tree, and recommenced the pursuit with the same figure still flying before him.

The steep rise of the pit had somewhat blown the fugitive's horse, and for the first hundred yards or so, Captain Hayward gained upon him; but the foremost horseman soon brought all his knowledge of the country to bear,—every pond, every bank, every quagmire, gave him some advantage, and when, at the end of about ten minutes, they neared the plantations at the end of the moor, he was considerably further from his pursuer than when their headlong race began. At length, he disappeared where the road led in amongst trees and hedgerows, and any farther chase seemed to promise little. Ned Hayward was a sadly persevering disposition, however; he had an exceedingly great dislike to be frustrated in anything, and on he therefore rode without drawing a rein, thinking, "In

this more populous part of the country, I shall surely meet with some one whom he has passed, and who will give me information."

It was a wonderfully solitary, a thinly-peopled district, however, which lay on the other side of the moor from Tarningham. They went early to bed, too, in that part of the world, and not a living soul did Ned Hayward meet for a full mile up the long lane. At the end of that distance, the road branched into three, and in the true spirit of knight-errantry, the young gentleman threw down his rein on the horse's neck, leaving it to carry him on in search of adventures, according to its own sagacity. The moor was about four miles and a half across; but in the various turnings and windings they had taken, now here and now there upon its surface, horse and man had contrived to triple that distance, or perhaps something more. There had been a trot to the town before and back again, a hand-canter through the park, and then a tearing burst across the moor. The horse therefore thought, with some reason, that there had been enough of riding and being ridden for one night, and as soon as Ned Hayward laid down the reins it fell from a gallop to a canter, from a canter to a trot, and was beginning to show an inclination to a walk, if not to stand still, when Ned Hayward requested it civilly with his heels to go on a little faster. It had now selected its path, however, remembering Ovid's axiom, that the middle of the road is the safest. This was all that Ned Hayward could have desired at its hands, if it had had any; but of its hoofs he required that they should accelerate their motions, and on he went again at a rapid pace, till, suddenly turning into a high road, he saw nearly before him, on the left hand, six large elms in a row, with a horse-trough under the two nearest; an enormous sign swinging between the two central trees, and an inn, with four steps up to the door, standing a little back from the road.

There was a good light streaming from some of the windows; the moon was shining clear, but the dusty old elms were thick with foliage, which effectually screened the modest figures on the sign from the garish beams of either the domestic or the celestial luminary.

Ned Hayward drew in his rein as soon as he beheld the inn and its accompaniments; then approached softly, paused to consider, and ultimately rode into the courtyard, without troubling the people of the house with any notification of his arrival. He found two men in the yard in stable dresses, who immediately approached with

somewhat officious civility, saying, "Take your horse, sir?"

And Ned Hayward, dismounting slowly, like a man very much tired, gave his beast ¹to their hands, and affected to saunter quietly back to the inn, while they led his stout little cob into the stables. Then suddenly turning, after he had taken twenty steps, he followed at a brisk pace: he passed the stable-door, walking deliberately down the whole row of horses in the stalls, till he stopped opposite one—a bright bay, with a long back, and thick, high crest, which was still covered with lather, and had evidently been ridden furiously not many minutes before.

Turning suddenly to the ostler and his help, who had evidently viewed his proceedings with more consternation than was quite natural, he placed himself between them and the door, and demanded with a bent brow and a stern tone, "Where is the master of this horse?"

The help, who was nearest, gasped in his face like a caught trout, but the ostler pushed him aside, and replied instantly, "He is in doors, sir—in number eleven."

And turning on his heel, Ned Hayward immediately entered the inn.

CHAPTER XV.

WE left Sir John Slingsby with an exclamation in his mouth. An expression of wonder it was, at what could have become of his friend Ned Hayward, and the reader may recollect that it was then about ten o'clock at night. Quitting the worthy baronet in somewhat abrupt and unceremonious haste, we hurried after the young officer ourselves, in order to ascertain his fate and fortune with our own eyes; and now having done that, we must return once more to Tarningham Park, and make an apology to Sir John, for our rude dereliction of his house and company. He is a good-natured man, not naturally inclined to make himself peculiarly anxious or apprehensive about any man on the face of the earth; so that, even in the case of his dear friend, Ned Hayward, he let things take their chance, as was his custom, trusting to fortune to bring about a good result, and philosophically convinced, that if the blind goddess did not choose to do so, it was not in his power to make her. During the evening he had once or twice shown some slight symptoms of uneasiness when he looked round and remarked his guest's absence; he had scolded his daughter a little, too, for not

singing as well as usual; and, to say the truth, she had deserved it; for, whether the story told by the gentlemen on their return from the dining-room had frightened her—it not being customary at Tarningham House to have shots fired through the windows—or whether it was that she was uneasy at Captain Hayward's prolonged absence, she certainly did not do her best at the piano. Sing as ill as she would, however, Mary Clifford, who sang with her, kept her in countenance. Now Mary was a very finished musician, with an exceedingly rich, sweet-toned voice, flexible, and cultivated in a high degree, with which she could do anything she chose; so that it was very evident that she either did not choose to sing well, or else that she was thinking of something else.

But to return to Sir John. Perhaps, if we could look into all the dark corners of his heart—those curious little pigeon-holes that are in the breast of every man, containing all the odd crotchets and strange feelings and sensations, the unaccountable perversities, the whimsical desires and emotions, which we so studiously conceal from the common eye—it is not at all improbable that we should find a certain degree of satisfaction, a comfort, a relief, derived by the worthy baronet, from the unusual events which had chequered and enlivened that evening. Before dinner, he had looked forward to the passing of the next six or seven hours with some degree of apprehension; he had thought it would be monstrous dull, with all the proprieties and decorums which he felt called upon to maintain before his sister; and the excitement of the interview with Mr. Wittingham, the examination of Stephen Gimlet, and the unaccountable disappearance of Ned Hayward, supplied the vacancy occasioned by the absence of the bottle and jest. Soon after the gentlemen had entered the drawing-room, Sir John placed his niece and his daughter at the piano, and engaged Dr. Miles, his sister, and even Mr. Beauchamp in a rubber at whist; and though from time to time he turned round his head to scold Isabella for singing negligently, yet he contrived to extract amusement from the game,—laughing, talking, telling anecdotes, commenting upon the play of his partner and his opponents, and turning everything into jest and merriment. Thus passed the evening to the hour I have mentioned, when Mrs. Clifford rose and retired to bed; and the first exclamation of Sir John, after she was gone, was that which I have recorded.

"It is strange, indeed," said Beauchamp, in reply; "but

you know his habits better than I do, and can better judge what has become of him."

"Indeed, my dear uncle," said Miss Clifford, with an earnest air, "I think you ought to make some inquiries. I do not believe Captain Hayward would have gone away in so strange a manner, without some extraordinary motive, and after the alarming circumstance that has happened to-night, one cannot well be without apprehension."

"A humm-scarum fellow!" answered Sir John; "nobody ever knew what he would do next. Some wild-goose scheme of his or another; I saw him once jump off the Mole at Gibraltar, when he was a mere boy, to save the life of a fellow who had better have been drowned; a sneaking Spanish thief, half-smuggler and half-spy."

"And did he save him?" exclaimed Miss Clifford, eagerly.

"Oh, to be sure!" answered Sir John; "he swims like a Newfoundland dog, that fellow."

"Your carriage, sir," said a servant, entering and addressing Mr. Beauchamp.

"Here, Jones," cried Sir John Slingsby; "do you know what has become of Captain Hayward? We have not seen him all night."

"Why, Sir John," answered the man, "Ralph, the under-groom, told me he had met the captain in the park, as he was returning from taking your note to Mr. Wharton, and that Captain Hayward made him get down, jumped upon the cob, and rode away out at the gates as hard as he could go."

"There, I told you so," said Sir John Slingsby; "Heaven only knows what he is about, and there is no use trying to find it out; but this is too bad of you, Mr. Beauchamp, ordering your carriage at this hour. The days of curfew are passed, and we can keep the fire in a little after sundown."

"You should stay and see what has become of your friend, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella Slingsby. "I don't think that is like a true companion-in-arms, to go away and leave him, just when you know he is engaged in some perilous adventure."

Beauchamp was not proof against such persuasions; but we are all merchants in this world, trafficking for this or that, and sometimes bartering things that are of very little value to us in reality for others that we value more highly. Beauchamp made it a condition of his stay, that Isabella should go on singing; and Mary Clifford engaged her

uncle in a tête-à-tête, while Beauchamp leaned over her cousin at the piano. The first song was scarcely concluded, however, when the butler again made his appearance, saying,—

"You were asking, Sir John, what had become of Captain Hayward, and Stephen Gimlet has just come in to say that he saw him about an hour ago."

"Well, well," said Sir John, impatiently, "what the devil has become of him?—what bat-fowling expedition has he gone upon now? By Jove! that fellow will get his head broken some of these days; and then we shall discover whether there are any brains in it or not. Sometimes, I think there is a great deal, sometimes that there is none at all; but, at all events, he is as kind, good-hearted a fellow as ever lived—that's certain."

"Stephen Gimlet says, Sir John," replied the butler, with his usual solemnity, "that the captain went out on horseback, to hunt down the man who fired through the window."

"Whew!" whistled Sir John Slingsby; "was it not one of those cursed fools of gamekeepers, shooting a deer?"

"No, Sir John," answered the man, "it was some one who came in on horseback by the upper gates. Captain Hayward got upon the cob, and hunted him across the moor, till he lodged him in one of the pits on the other side, and was watching him there by the moonlight when Stephen Gimlet came up; for he was afraid, if he went in one way, that he might get out the other."

"Well, have they got him?—have they got him?" cried Sir John. "By Jove! this is too bad; one must have his plate made bomb-proof, if this is to go on."

"They have not got him, please you, Sir John," replied the butler; "for when Stephen came up, he and the Captain went in, and both got close up to the fellow, it seems, but he had time to charge his gun, and he fired straight at them. Wolf—that is, Mr. Gimlet—says he is sure Captain Hayward is wounded; but the man rode away as hard as he could go before they could stop him, and the Captain jumped upon the cob, and went after him again at the full gallop."

"Where did they go? which way did they take?" exclaimed the baronet, bustling up warmly; "by Jove! this is too bad, it must be put down! Tell Matthews and Harrison, and two or three more to get out horses as fast as possible. Which way did they take?—can't you answer?—have you got no ears?"

"Stephen said, sir, that they seemed to go towards Buxton's inn," replied the butler; "but he could not well see, for they got in amongst the woods."

"By Jove! I'll soon settle this matter," cried Sir John; "I'll just get on a pair of boots, and be off—Mr. Beauchamp you must stay till I come back,—so come, be friendly, send away your carriage, and take a bed."

"Upon one condition, Sir John," replied Beauchamp, "that you allow me to be the companion of your ride."

"No, no!" cried Sir John, rubbing his hands, "my dear fellow, you must stay and protect the ladies."

"Oh, we shall do very well, papa," cried Isabella; "only order all the doors and windows to be shut, and I will command in camp till you return."

"There's a hero!" cried Sir John Slingsby; "agreed! Jones, Jones, you dog, tell the boy to take away his horses, and not to come for Mr. Beauchamp till this time to-morrow night—nay, I insist, Beauchamp—no refusal, no refusal—capital haunch of venison, just ready for the spit—bottle of Burgundy, and all very proper—everything as prim as my grandmother's maiden aunt—but come along, I'll equip you for your ride—ha, ha, ha, capital fun, by Jove! Ned Hayward's a famous fellow to give us such a hunt extempore; as good as a bagged fox, and a devil of a deal better than a drag."

Thus saying, Sir John Slingsby rolled out of the room, followed by Mr. Beauchamp, to prepare themselves for their expedition, from a vast store of very miscellaneous articles, which the baronet's dressing-room contained. He was, heaven knows, anything but a miser, and yet in that dressing-room were to be found a multitude of old suits of clothes and equipments of different kinds which he had possessed at every different period, from twenty to hard upon the verge of sixty; jack-boots, dress-pumps, hob-nailed shoes, Hessians, and pen-dragons, great coats, small coats, suits of regimentals, wrap-rascals, the complete costume of a harlequin, which now would barely have held one of his thighs, and a mask and domino. But with each of these pieces of apparel was connected some little incident, or tale, or jest, which clung lingering to the old gentleman's memory, associating with occurrences sweet, or joyous, or comic; sometimes even with sad events, but always with something that touched one or other of the soft points in his heart; and he never could make up his mind to part with them. From these he would have fain furnished his guest with a wardrobe, but unfortunately the baronet and Mr. Beauchamp were of very different sizes,

and he laughingly put away the pair of boots that were offered, saying, "No, no, Sir John, my shoes will do very well; I have ridden in every sort of foot-covering under the sun, I believe, from wooden boots to morocco leather slipper; but I will take this large cloak that is hanging here, in case we should have to bivouac."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Sir John again; "a capital notion; I should not mind it at all—light a great fire on the top of the moor, turn our toes in, and put a bundle of heath under our heads—we have got capital heath here. Were you ever in Scotland, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"I was, sir, once," answered Beauchamp, in a tone so stern and grave, that Sir John Slingsby suddenly looked up, and saw the countenance of his guest clouded and gloomy, as if something exceedingly offensive or painful had just been said to him. It cleared up in a moment, however, and as soon as the baronet was ready they issued forth again, and descended into the hall.

In the meanwhile, Isabella and her cousin had remained sitting near the piano, both rather thoughtful in mood. For a minute or two each was silent, busied apparently with separate trains of thought. At length, Mary looked up, inquiring, "What do you intend to do, Isabella?"

"What do you mean, Mary, love?" replied her cousin; "if you mean to ask whether I intend to marry Ned Hayward, as I have a slight notion papa intends I should, I say No at once;" and she laughed gaily.

"Oh, no," answered Miss Clifford; "my question was not half so serious a one, Isabella; though I do not see why you should not, either. I only wished to ask whether you intended to sit up or go to bed."

"Why I should not marry Ned Hayward," exclaimed Isabella, gaily, "I can give you twenty good reasons in a minute. We are both so thoughtless; we should ruin ourselves in a couple of years; we are both so merry, we should laugh ourselves to death in a fortnight; we are both so harum-scarum, as papa calls it, that it would not be safe for one to trust the other out of his sight; for a thousand to one we should never meet again; he would go to the East Indies, and I to the West seeking him; and then each would go to meet the other, and we should pass each other by the way."

Mary Clifford smiled thoughtfully; and after pausing in meditation for a moment or two, she answered, "After all, Isabella, I have some doubts as to whether either of you is as thoughtless as you take a pleasure in seeming."

"Oh, you do me injustice—you do me injustice, Mary,"

cried Miss Slingsby; "I seem nothing but what I am. As to Captain Hayward," she added, with a sly smile, "you know best, Mary, dear. He is your *preux chevalier*, you know; delivered you from lions and tigers, and giants and ravishers, and, as in duty bound, has talked to nobody but you all day."

Mary coloured a little, but replied straightforwardly, "Oh, yes, we have talked a good deal, enough to make me think that he is not so thoughtless as my uncle says; and I know you are not so thoughtless as you say you are yourself. But what do you intend to do while they are gone?"

"Oh, I shall sit up, of course," answered Isabella; "I always do, till papa goes to bed. When he has a large party, and I hear an irruption of the Goths and Vandals making its way hither—which I can always discover by the creaking of the glass door—I retreat into that little room and fortify myself with lock and key, for I have no taste for mankind in a state of drunkenness; and then when they have roared and bellowed, and laughed, and quarrelled, and drank their coffee, and gone away, I come out and talk to papa for half an hour, till he is ready to go to bed."

"But is he always in a very talking condition himself?" asked Mary Clifford.

"Oh, fie now, Mary," exclaimed her cousin; "how can you suffer your mind to be prejudiced by people's reports. My father likes to see every one happy, and even jovial under his roof—perhaps a little too much—but if you mean to say he gets tipsy, it is not the case; I never saw him the least so in all my life; in fact, I don't think he could if he would; for I have seen him drink as much wine as would make me tipsy twenty times over, without its having any effect upon him at all—a little gay, indeed; but he is always gay after dinner."

Mary Clifford listened with a quiet smile, but replied not to Isabella's discourse upon her father's sobriety, merely saying, "Well, if you sit up, my dear cousin, I shall sit up too, to keep you company;" but scarcely had the words passed her sweet lips, when in came Sir John Slingsby and Mr. Beauchamp, the baronet holding a note open in his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried; "news of the deserter, news of the deserter, we had just got to the hall door, horses ready, cloaks on our backs, servants mounted, plans arranged, a gallop of five or six miles and a bivouac on the morrow before us, when up walks one of the boys from Buxton with this note from the runaway; let us see what

he says," and approaching the lamp, he read by its light several detached sentences from Ned Hayward's letter, somewhat to the following effect:—"Dear Sir John,—For fear you should wonder what has become of me—(so I did, by Jove)—I write this to tell you—(ah, I knew all that before)—cantered him across the common—earthed him in an old sand-pit—rascal fired at me—not much harm done—chased him along the road, but lost him at the three turnings—came on here—very tired—comfortable quarters—particular reason for staying where I am—over with you early in the morning—Ned Hayward."

"Ah, very well—very well!" continued Sir John; "that's all right; so now, Beauchamp, if you are for a game at piquet, I am your man; if not, some wine-and-water and then to bed. I'll put you under the tutelage of my man Galveston, who knows what's required by every sort of man in the world, from the grand Turk down to the Methodist parson, and he will provide you with all that is necessary."

Mr. Beauchamp, however, declined both piquet and wine-and-water; and, in about half an hour the whole party had retired to their rooms; and gradually Tarningham Hall sank into silence and repose.

One of the last persons who retired to rest was Sir John Slingsby himself; for, before he sought his own room, he visited the library, and there, lying on the table where his letters were usually placed, he found a note, neatly folded and sealed, and directed in a stiff, clear, clerk like hand. He took it up and looked at it; laid it down again: took it up once more; held it for at least three minutes in his hand as if irresolute whether he should open it or not; and at length tore open the seal, exclaiming,—

"No, hang me if I go to bed with such a morsel on my stomach."

Then, putting it on the other side of the candle, and his glass to his eye, he read the contents. They did not seem to be palatable, for the first sentence made him exclaim,—

"Pish! I know you, my buck!"

After that he read on again; and, though he made no further exclamation, his brow became cloudy, and his eye anxious. When he had done he threw it down, put his hands behind his back, and walked two or three times up and down the room, stopping every now and then to gaze at the Turkey carpet.

"Hang him!" he cried at length. "By Jove! this is a pretty affair."

And then he walked up and down again.

"Well, devil take it!" he cried, at length, tearing the note to pieces, and throwing the fragments into the basket under the table, "it will come, some how or other, I dare say. There is always something turns up—if not, the trees must go—can't be helped—improve the prospect—landscape gardening—ha! ha! ha!"

And laughing heartily he rolled off to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE scene from the windows of Tarningham Hall was not a very extensive one, but it was fine in its peculiar character: the sweeps of the park; the dewy lawns; the large old trees; the broad and feathery fern; the stately deer, walking along with unconfirmed steps and half-awakened deliberation; the matutinal hares, scudding about in the gray twilight; and the squirrels rushing from tree to tree, were all pleasant to the eye that looked upon them, though that eye could only at one small point, where a break in the wood gave a wider view, catch anything beyond the domain, and all that even there was gained consisted of a narrow portion of that same streak of yellow light which broke the monotonous curtain of the cloud towards the east.

Nevertheless, for several minutes, Mary Clifford gazed upon the whole with pleasure and interest. She was early in her habits; a familiar child of the morning; and the dew on the leaves was a delight to her; the soft gray of the early day, a sort of invitation to contemplation and enjoyment. After marking the deer, and smiling at the sportive gambols of the hares, who, as it was forbidden to shoot near the house, played fearlessly on the lawns, she turned her eyes towards the spot where the dawning morning-light was visible, and recollecting that not far from the house, on what was called the terrace, there was a point whence the whole scene over the country was visible, and where she could watch, with uninterrupted pleasure, all the effects of the breaking day upon that beautiful landscape, she sallied forth to enjoy a peculiar sort of pleasure, which requires a very pure and unsullied mind, and a heart naturally elevated and devout to understand it fully.

Down the broad oak stairs, with its narrow strip of carpet, along the old marble hall, with its tessellated floor, Mary Clifford went slowly and quietly, lighted alone by a skylight overhead, and a large window over the great

doors; but she could hear the gay birds singing without; the thrush upon the tree-top; the woodlark in the shade; the linnet, with its small, sweet song, and the chaffinch in his spring dress and his spring notes amongst the bushes. She opened the door of the library and went in, leaving it unclosed behind her, then unbarred and unlocked the glass door, and went out and gazed about her. Some deer that were near the house started and withdrew a few steps, and then paused to stare at her; but whether it was that they had never seen any of their companions slaughtered by a being in a woman's dress, or that they thought she looked, as she really did, sweet and gentle as the morning, they did not take flight, trotting a few steps further after a long look, and then stopping with their heads together to converse over the matter.

After closing the door, Mary walked on towards the terrace. All was still and tranquil; but at length she heard some voices speaking, and looked in the direction in which they came.

"Some of the grooms," she thought, as her eyes rested on the stables at some little distance in the rear of the house; and although it was not at all probable that they would disturb her reveries, yet she walked slowly part of the way back, for one-half of the pleasure which she derived from her early walk lay in its solitude. She was wishing that the grooms had thought fit to lie in bed for half an hour longer when she heard, proceeding from the lower ground under the bank of the terrace, the light and rapid footfalls of some one apparently walking from the stables to the mansion; and, not at all wishing to meet any one, she turned back again towards the yews. At the end of the terrace, however, the footsteps stopped; there was a momentary pause, and then they mounted the steps, and came along the gravel towards her. Mary walked on to the end and then turned, when straight before her appeared Captain Hayward, coming on with his usual light and cheerful air, though the sleeve of his coat was cut open, and it was evident that he had bandages round his arm.

"Good morning, good morning, Miss Clifford," he said, advancing frankly, and taking her hand; "what a magnificent morning! I see you are as early in your habits as myself. But did you ever see such a rich dove-colour as that which has come upon those clouds? I love some of these calm gray mornings, with the promise of a bright day they give, better far than those skies all purple and gold such as are described by thatrodomontade fellow,

Marmontel, in his 'Incas,' which are always sure to end in clouds and rain. I have always thought those very bright mornings like a dashing woman of fashion, tricked out in her best smiles and her brightest colours, promising all sorts of things with her eyes which she does not intend to perform, and cold or frowning before half an hour is over."

"And the gray morning, Captain Hayward," asked Mary, with a smile, "what is that like?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Captain Hayward, laughing; "you must not drive my imagination too hard, dear lady, lest it stumble. Perhaps the gray morning is like a calm, quiet, well brought-up country girl with a kind heart under the tranquil look, which will give a long day of sunshine after its first coolness is passed."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and did not answer; but, as she was walking on towards the house, Ned Hayward continued, in his usual straightforward way: "You must not go in yet, my dear Miss Clifford; I want you to take a turn or two with me upon this delightful terrace. You must, indeed, for I have got a thousand things to say, and I know I shall find nobody else to say them to for the next two or three hours."

His fair companion did not think fit to refuse, though some prudish people might have thought it a little improper to take a walk at five o'clock in the morning with a young captain of infantry unattached; but Mary Clifford had only known Captain Hayward six-and-thirty hours, and therefore she saw nothing in the least improper in it in the world. Young ladies who guard so very scrupulously against being made love to, forget that they show what they expect. She turned, therefore, with him at once and replied, "You must, indeed, have a long series of adventures to tell us. I am delighted to forestall the rest of the family, and to have the news myself three hours before any one. We were all in great alarm about you last night. My uncle and Mr. Beauchamp, and half-a-dozen servants, were setting out to seek you, upon the report of Stephen Gimlet as they call him, the father of the little boy you saved; but your note just arrived in time to stop them."

"Oh, then, Master Gimlet, I suppose, has told my story for me?" said Ned Hayward.

"Only very briefly," answered the young lady; "he you had chased some man over the common, who had fired at you, and he was afraid had wounded you; and I fear from what I see, he was right."

"Oh, it was nothing—nothing at all!" replied Ned Hayward; "but I'll tell you all about it as circumstantially as a newspaper;" and he went on in a gay and lively tone to give an account of his adventures of the preceding night till his arrival at Buxton's inn. Sometimes he made Mary Clifford laugh, sometimes look grave and apprehensive, but he always interested her deeply in his tale; and she showed that she had marked one part particularly by asking, "Then, did you know the man when you saw his face so distinctly in the pit?"

"Up to that moment I thought I did," replied her companion, "but then I saw I was utterly mistaken. I will acknowledge to you, my dear Miss Clifford, that, till he turned round, I fancied he was one I had seen before—the same height, the same make; but, under existing circumstances, I felt that nothing would justify me in giving up the pursuit, although it was most painful to me, I assure you, to follow, with the purpose of punishing, a young gentleman in whom, from what you said yesterday at dinner, I conceive you take a considerable interest."

"Who? Mr. Wittingham?" exclaimed Mary Clifford, her face turning as red as scarlet. "Oh, Captain Hayward, you are mistaken! I take no interest in him, I abhor him; or, at least—at least, I dislike him very much."

Ned Hayward looked puzzled, and he really was so in a considerable degree. After a moment given to consideration, he replied, more cautiously than might have been expected. "I have somehow mistaken you, my dear lady," he said, at length, "and such mistakes may be dangerous. I have no right to force myself into your confidence: but really the whole of this affair is becoming serious. When first I had the pleasure of seeing you I found you subjected to what was certainly a great outrage. I call it so; for I am perfectly certain that you yourself must have considered it as such; and there could not even be a palliation for it, except——" he paused an instant, and then added, gravely, "except love on both sides disappointed by objections arising in the prejudices of others."

Mary Clifford coloured deeply, but suffered him to proceed. "I need not tell you, after what I have said," he continued, "that I have recognised and identified the principal person concerned in this business. At dinner you expressed a very strong desire that the offender should not be punished; but the former offence was followed by a very serious crime. A shot was fired last night into your uncle's dining-room, amidst a party of gentlemen quietly drinking their wine, which very nearly struck the father of

the very man who had already rendered himself amenable to the laws of his country by his attack upon you. I had suspicions that he was the perpetrator of this crime, and although, as it turned out, he certainly was not the person I pursued across the moor, yet I have some very strong reasons to think that he was a participator in the offence. These are all very serious circumstances; but I am ignorant of those which have preceded these events, and if without pain to yourself you could give me any explanations which might guide my mind to the causes of all that has occurred, it might be very serviceable in many respects. I am sure you will answer me frankly, if it be possible; and, believe me, I am not one to act harshly, or to abuse your confidence—nay, more, thoughtless as I may seem, and as I am called, be assured I will do naught without consideration and forethought.”

“I am sure you will not, Captain Hayward,” answered Mary Clifford, warmly—“quite sure; and I have no hesitation in giving you my confidence; though, indeed, I have very little to tell. These things are always unpleasant to speak about, and that is the only motive I could have for remaining silent; but this gentleman’s conduct has been so very public, that I am saved from all scruples on his account. About two years ago, I met Mr. Henry Wittingham at the county ball, danced with him there, and observed nothing in his behaviour which should make me treat him differently from other new acquaintances. I did not think him agreeable, but he was not offensive. He asked me to dance again the same night, and I refused, but shortly after he was formally introduced at our house. My father asked him to dinner, and was, indeed, very kind both to him and Mr. Wittingham his father, because he thought that they were unjustly looked down upon and treated coldly by the county gentry on account of their family. I soon began to find that—that—I really do not well know how to go on—but that this young gentleman’s visits were more frequent than was pleasant, and that he always contrived to be near me, especially when we met in public. His conversation, his manners, as I knew more of him, became insupportably disagreeable. I tried as much as I could to avoid him, to check his advances, at first quietly, but decidedly without speaking to any one else, for I did not wish to produce any breach between my father and Mr. Wittingham; but, at last, I found that he made a parade and a boast of his intimacy, and then I thought it best to speak both to mamma and my dear father. What was done I really do not know; but cer-

tainly something took place which very much enraged both father and son, and the latter was forbidden to visit at our house. The result was anything but deliverance from his persecution. From that moment he chose to assume, that the objection was on the side of my parents, and I cannot tell you how I have been annoyed. I have not ventured to walk out alone, for, although once when I met him in the village, I told him plainly my sentiments towards him, he still persisted in the most unpleasant manner, that I spoke alone from mamma's dictation, and for months he used to hang about the place, till I really grew nervous at the sight of every human being whom I did not instantly recognise. This last outrage has been worse than all; and I will admit that it deserves punishment; but I am afraid, from various circumstances which accompanied it, that the law, if carried into effect, would punish it too severely. My uncle declared he would hang the man if he could catch him; and, oh, think, Captain Hayward, what a horrible reflection that would ever be to me through life, to think that I had been even the innocent cause of bringing a fellow-creature to a disgraceful death."

"Painful, indeed, I do not doubt," answered Ned Hayward, "but yet——"

"Nay, nay," cried Mary, "do not say but yet, Captain Hayward. I could never make up my mind to give evidence against him; and, to speak selfishly, the very fact of having to appear in a court of justice, and of having my name in public newspapers, would render the punishment nearly as great to me as to him. These were my sole motives, I can assure you, in what I said yesterday, and not the slightest personal interest in one who has, I am afraid, in all situations disgraced himself."

For some reason or another, Ned Hayward was glad to hear Mary Clifford defend herself, and so warmly too, from the imputation of any feeling of regard for Harry Wittingham; but he took care not to show, to its full extent, all the pleasure that he felt.

"I thought it strange, indeed," he said, "that you should entertain any great feeling of esteem for a person who certainly seemed to me not worthy of it; but there are often circumstances, my dear Miss Clifford, unseen by the general eye, which endear two people to each other, who seem the most dissimilar—youthful companionship, services rendered, old associations—a thousand things build up, between persons the least likely to assimilate, ties which are stronger than all opposing principles. I thought

that such might be the case with you; but, as it is not, let me tell you what was the end of my adventure last night, and then you will see what cause I have for suspicion. I must inform you, in the first instance, that I marked the person of Mr. Henry Wittingham well on the evening of the attack, notwithstanding the twilight, and that I saw him yesterday in Tarningham. His father's unwillingness to enter into the charge, when made against some unknown person, excited suspicion; but I found afterwards, from other sources, that Mr. Wittingham and his son had quarrelled, and were completely at variance; and, in the justice-room, the young man whispered something to the old one, of which I heard only two or three words, but they were of a threatening nature. I have told you that I thought I recognised the figure of the man who fired the shot, and Stephen Gimlet declared he could swear the horse he rode was Henry Wittingham's; but I found, as I have said, that the man in the pit was a stranger. When, after pursuing him as long as I had any trace, I at length arrived at a place called, I find, Buxton's Inn, I saw the very horse in the stable, in a state which left no doubt that it had been ridden hard for several hours, and had not been in five minutes. I inquired for the master, and was told the number of the room where he was to be found. I walked straight in, and found Mr. Henry Wittingham sitting quietly at supper. Some conversation ensued, in the course of which I told him the cause of my intrusion; and his whole manner was confused and agitated. He swore violently at the idea of anybody having ridden his horse, and affected not to believe it; but I made him come down to the stable, when, of course, his mouth was closed."

"But who did ride it, then?" exclaimed Miss Clifford.

"Nay, that I cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward; "but I resolved to wait at the inn and see if I could discover anything. I was shown into a very neat little sitting-room, and wrote a note to your uncle, Sir John, while they were getting my coffee. It was now nearly ten o'clock, and there was a room apparently similar to my own on each side of me, with a door of communication with either. I suppose they were locked, so as to prevent the passage of anything very fat or corporeal from one room into the other, but certainly were not so well closed as to exclude all sound. It may seem a strange thing for me, my dear Miss Clifford, to give you an account of the sitting-rooms of an inn; but so much depends in this world upon what is called juxtaposition, that very im-

portant events have depended upon the keyhole of a door. You must not suppose, however, that I made use of either of the keyholes in my room for the laudable and honourable purpose of eaves-dropping; on the contrary, I spoke loud enough to the waiter to give sufficient notice to my neighbours, if I had any, that voices were distinguishable from one room to the other; and it would seem that Mr. Henry Wittingham, who was on the left-hand side, was determined to impress me not only with the same fact, but also with a notion that he was in a towering passion on account of the usage his horse had met with; for he cursed and swore very severely, to which the waiter, or whoever he spoke to, did not reply. There seemed to be nobody on the other side for about half an hour, when, as I was sitting at my coffee, after having dispatched my note, I heard steps come up from below, a door open, and the voice of the waiter say most respectfully, 'I will tell the Captain you are here, Mr. Wharton.'

"Was it Mr. Wharton, the lawyer?" exclaimed Mary, with some degree of eagerness.

"I really cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward, "but I suspect it was from what passed afterwards. All was silent for about three minutes, except when I heard a step walking up and down the room. As your uncle had mentioned Mr. Wharton's name more than once in the course of yesterday, I fancied he might have come upon business to some one, which there was no necessity for my hearing; and therefore I rattled the cups and saucers, moved about the chair, tumbled over a footstool, and left them to take their own course."

"Mr. Wharton is a very shrewd man," said Mary Clifford, "and one I should think a hint would not be thrown away upon."

"He did not choose to take mine, however," replied Ned Hayward; "for at the end of a few minutes, some one seemed to join him, saying, in a loud and familiar tone, 'Ha! how do you do, Wharton? Very glad to see you again! I hope you have brought me some money.'"

"Was it Mr. Wittingham's voice?" asked Miss Clifford.

"Oh, dear, no," replied Captain Hayward; "one quite of a different tone; a good deal of the same swaggering insolence in it, but, to my fancy, there was more bold and dogged determination. Every now and then there was a small pause too, before a word was pronounced, which one generally finds in the speech of a cunning man; but yet there was a sort of sneering persiflage in the words, which I have more generally met with in the empty-headed cox-

combs of fashion, who have nothing to distinguish them but impertinence and a certain position in society. However, it could not be Mr. Wittingham, for him this lawyer must have known very well, and his reply was—"Indeed, Captain Moreton, I have not; but I thought it better to come over and answer your note in person, to see what could be done for you."

"Captain Moreton!" cried Mary; "I know who it is very well—not that I ever saw him, as far as I can remember; for he quitted this part of the country ten or twelve years ago when I was quite a child; but I have often heard my father say that he was a bad, reckless man, and had become quite an adventurer, after having broken his mother's heart, ruined his other parent, and abridged poor old Mr. Moreton's days. He died quite in poverty three years ago, after having sold his estate, or mortgaged it, or something of the kind, to this very Mr. Wharton, the attorney."

"Indeed!" said Ned Hayward, "that explains a great deal, my dear young lady. Where, did this property lie?"

"Just beyond my uncle's—a little way on the other side of the moor," replied Miss Clifford.

Ned Hayward fell into a fit of thought, and did not reply for some moments. At length he said, with a laugh, "Well, I do not know that their conversation would interest you very much, though, 'in spite of all I could do, I heard a great part of it; and as for the rest, I must manage the best way I can myself."

"You are very tantalising, Captain Hayward," said his fair companion, "and you seem to imply that I could aid in something. If I can, I think you are bound to tell me. Confidence for confidence, you know," and when she had done she coloured slightly, as if feeling that her words implied more than she meant.

"Assuredly," replied Ned Hayward; "but I only fear I might distress you."

"If what you say has reference to Mr. Wittingham," the young lady answered, raising her eyes to his face with a look of ingenuous frankness, "let me assure you once for all, that nothing you can say will distress me if it do not imply that I feel something else than the coldest indifference."

"Nay, it does not refer to him at all," replied Ned Hayward; "but to one you love better."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion, her lip trembling with eagerness, "tell me—tell me, Captain Hayward!

After what you have said, I must beg and intreat that you would."

"I will, then," answered Ned Hayward, gazing upon her with a look of admiration blended with sorrow at the pain he was about to inflict. "I believe, Miss Clifford, I am about to commit an indiscretion in mentioning this subject to you at all; for I do not know that you can assist materially; and yet it is something to have one to consult with—one, in whose generosity, in whose kindness, sympathy—ay, and good sense, too, I can fully trust. Besides, you know, I dare say, all the people in the neighbourhood, and may give me some serviceable hints."

"But speak—speak!" said Miss Clifford, pausing in their walk up and down the terrace, as she saw that he fought round a subject which he thought would distress her, with a timid unwillingness to do so—"what is it you have to tell me?"

"Why, I very much fear, my dear young lady," answered Captain Hayward, "that your uncle is very much embarrassed—nay—why should I disguise the matter?—absolutely ruined."

Mary Clifford clasped her hands together, and was about to answer with an exclamation of sorrow and surprise; but I do believe that no person on earth was ever permitted to give an explanation uninterrupted. The fates are against it; at least, they were so in this instance: for just as Ned Hayward had uttered the last very serious words, they heard a light step tripping up behind them, and, both turning suddenly round, beheld Miss Slingsby's French maid.

"Ah, Ma'amsele," she said, as soon as she reached them, "I saw you out in this early morning without anything on, and so have brought you a shawl."

"Thank you, thank you, Minette," replied Mary, and, as she was well accustomed to early walks, was about to decline the shawl; but, judging the quickest mode of getting rid of the maid would be to take it, she added, "Very well—give it to me," and cast it carelessly round her shoulders.

The maid would not be satisfied with that arrangement, however, adjusted it herself, showed how the ladies of Paris shawled themselves, and occupied full ten minutes, during which her poor victim remained in all the tortures of suspense.

As soon as the maid had taken herself away, Ned Hayward said, in a kind and feeling tone, "I fear I have distressed you much, Miss Clifford; let us walk quite to the other end, and talk over this matter: for I have only been hurried into revealing this painful fact by my anxiety to

consult with some one as to the possibility, if not of remedying the existing evil, at least of preventing it from going further."

Mary walked on by his side in silence, with her hands clasped, and her eyes cast down with a look of deep thought ; but at length she looked up, saying, in a tone of one communing with herself—"Is it possible? What! with his fine property! But how can it be, Captain Hayward?—here he is, with an estate of at least eight thousand a-year in his own possession, to do with it what he chooses."

"To explain all, I had better tell you what I have heard," said her companion. "The tale may be false ; I trust part of it is so ; but a great part must be true ; and the man spoke as if from authority. The first part of their conversation which I overheard was in a light tone ; for a time the lawyer seemed to avoid grappling with the subject, and asked his companion after Madame, in not the most respectful manner. The Captain replied, she was very well, and in the other room ; but pressed the lawyer to the point. He turned away again, and inquired whether Captain Moreton had been successful at the card-table lately. He answered, 'Tolerably ; he had won a thousand pounds just before he came from London ;' but then added, 'Come, come, Wharton, no bush-fighting ; you know you owe me five hundred pounds, and I must have it.' To this the lawyer answered : 'No, indeed, Captain Moreton, you are mistaken ; I have told you so twice : the property was sold to a client of mine ; and if I had chosen to send in my whole bill, your father would have been greatly my debtor, instead of me being yours. The sum given was fifty-four thousand pounds ; forty thousand went to pay off the mortgage and your debts ; twelve thousand your father had ; and my bill, together with that of the solicitors of the opposite party, amounted in fact and reality to two thousand four hundred and seventy-two pounds. You recollect, I had not been paid for six years.'

"The next thing I heard," continued Ned Hayward, "was a loud laugh ; and then Captain Moreton exclaimed, 'Your client, Wharton ! very good—very good, indeed ; you must think me exceedingly green : I know as well as possible who bought the property for two-thirds of its value,—employed other solicitors for a fictitious client,—pocketed one-half of their bill, and added thereto a bill of his own, which was more than the double of what he was entitled to. Come, come, sir ; don't affect to sham a passion, for we have business to talk upon, and that of a serious kind. You are just going to sell the property again for the full

value; and before you do so, you shall disgorge a little.' The lawyer attempted to bluster, but unsuccessfully; for when he asked how Captain Moreton would stop him from selling the property, even if all he said were true, that worthy gentleman reminded him that his signature had been necessary to one of the papers; and then, when the attorney asserted it had been given, informed him, with a laugh, that the signature he had obtained was that of a marker at a billiard-table; the lawyer's clerk sent after him to Paris, having been unacquainted with his person. Mr. Wharton attempted to show that it was of no consequence; but the matter so far ended by his giving a check for five hundred pounds, on Captain Moreton's signing another paper; which I suppose was drawn up in the room, for a silence succeeded for some minutes. A part of what took place then was not distinct; and I certainly made no effort to hear it."

"But my uncle," said Miss Clifford—"how does this affect my uncle?"

"He came upon the carpet next," replied Ned Hayward. "Captain Moreton asked who was going to buy the property; and when the lawyer made a mystery of it, saying that he really did not know the true parties, but that Doctor Miles had meddled in the business, the other named Sir John as the probable purchaser. Thereat Mr. Wharton laughed heartily, and said, 'I'll tell you what, Captain, Sir John Slingsby is at this moment next thing to a beggar.'"

Mary put her hands before her eyes, and turned very pale.

"Forgive me, my dear Miss Clifford," continued Ned Hayward, "for repeating such unpleasant words; but it is better you should hear all. I will hasten, however:—Captain Moreton affected not to believe the tale; and then the lawyer went on to mention the facts. He stated that your uncle's property was mortgaged to the utmost extent; that the interest of two half years would be due in ten days; that notice of foreclosure had been given, and the time would expire before six weeks are over; that there are considerable personal debts, and that Sir John had written to him that very day, to get a further advance of ten thousand pounds, which was absolutely necessary to stave off utter ruin, even for a short time. Now I happen to know that Sir John did actually write to this man, and as Mr. Wharton could have no object in deceiving the person he was speaking to, I fear the tale is too true."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Mary

Clifford. "Oh, Captain Hayward, how terrible it is to know this, and not to be able to assist!"

Captain Hayward paused a single instant, and then replied, with a look of deep feeling and interest, "Perhaps I ought not to have told you this, Miss Clifford," he said; "but I am a very thoughtless person, I am afraid; and yet I did not do this without thought, either. You know that I have a deep regard for your uncle; he was a very kind friend to me in days gone by: but having observed him well, and with that accuracy which, strange as it may seem to say, is only to be found in extreme youth, I know that it is perfectly in vain to talk with him on the subject of his embarrassments, unless at the very moments when they are the most pressing and severe. To talk with him then may be too late. He is one of those—and there are many of them—who, with a hopeful disposition, many resources in their own minds, and a happy faculty of banishing unpleasant thoughts, go on from one difficulty to another, finding means, through a great part of life, of putting off the evil day,—and who, thinking the chapter of accidents inexhaustible, come suddenly to a full stop in the end, with all their resources gone, and no possible means of disentangling themselves from their embarrassments. It has been his constant axiom for twenty years, to my certain knowledge, that, 'something would turn up;' and when such is the case, it is perfectly in vain to attempt to consult with a person so circumstanced as to the means of extricating him from difficulties, of which he always expects to be delivered by a lucky chance. Having found Fortune his best friend, he goes on trusting to her, till the fickle dame deserts him, and then looks around in bewilderment for assistance which cannot arrive."

"Too true a picture—too true a picture!" replied Miss Clifford, in a sorrowful tone—"I have seen it myself, Captain Hayward, and have been grieved to see it."

"Well, do not let us grieve, but act, my dear lady," said Ned Hayward; "let us consult together, and see what can be done, for good Sir John must be saved at any cost."

"But what can I do, Captain Hayward?" she inquired. "Perhaps you do not know that the whole of my fortune is tied up by my father's will so strictly that I can dispose of nothing till I have reached one-and-twenty years of age; and though I would willingly, most willingly, sacrifice anything to relieve my uncle, I am as powerless in this business as a child."

"This is unfortunate, indeed," said Ned Hayward, in

reply—"very unfortunate. I had hoped that you had command of your own property, or that you might be able to point out some one who would be able and willing to take this mortgage and relieve your uncle."

"I know of no one—no one on the earth," she answered; "my mother's is but a jointure; I am not of age for nine or ten months, and before that time it will be all over."

"The security is perfectly good," continued Ned Hayward, in a musing tone, as if he had not heard her; "and I feel very sure that the property is worth a great deal more than this man has advanced, or any of his clients, as he calls them. Otherwise it would not have been done. We should easily find some one, I think, to take the mortgage, if we could but pay this interest and stop the foreclosure—perhaps at a less percentage, too. That man is a rogue, I am sure, and we may very likely cut down a great many of the charges; for I feel very certain he has been purposely entangling good Sir John, till at length, when he thinks there is no possibility of escape, he pounces upon him to devour him."

"But what is to be done?—what is to be done?" reiterated Miss Clifford.

"Well, it does not matter," said Captain Hayward, in the same thoughtful tone; "I'll tell you what we must do: I have a sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the funds. Ten thousand, it seems, will be wanted for the most pressing matters—we will call it twelve thousand; for no man in your uncle's position reckons very closely what is needed, and his calculation is always below instead of above the mark. I will go up to town and sell out; that will put off matters for six weeks or two months; and, in the meantime, we must set all our wits to work for the purpose—first, of finding some one who will take the mortgage on reasonable terms; and next, of putting your uncle's affairs altogether into order."

"Oh! how can I thank you, Captain Hayward?" said Mary Clifford, putting her hand upon his arm; "indeed, indeed, I am very grateful."

"Without the slightest occasion," replied Ned Hayward. "I wish to Heaven I had the means of taking the mortgage myself; but the fact is, my poor father—as good a man as ever lived—was too kind and too easy an one. He put me very early into what is called a crack-regiment, which, in plain English, means, I suppose, a regiment likely soon to be broken, or, at all events, likely to break those that enter it. I had my expensive habits, like the rest, and never fancied that I should not find five or six

thousand a-year when I returned from Gibraltar at my father's death. Instead of that, I found the unentailed property totally gone; the entailed property was mine, as I was the last of my race. There were debts, however, to the amount of forty thousand pounds; and if I did not pay them, who would? The men would have to go without their money; so I sold the property, paid the debts, put the little that remained, between fifteen and sixteen thousand pounds, in the funds, and have lived within my income ever since. Thus, you see, I have not the means of taking the mortgage."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and was silent for a minute or two; for there were very strong emotions at her heart—sincere respect and admiration; more powerful, far, than they would have been had she conceived a high opinion of Ned Hayward's character at first, or if he had made a parade of his feelings and his actions. He treated it all so lightly, however, so much as a matter of course, both what he had done, and what he was about to do, that many an ordinary-minded person would have taken it on his own showing, and thought it a matter of course too. But Mary Clifford was not an ordinary-minded person, and she felt deeply.

"But what will you do yourself, Captain Hayward?" she said at length; "my uncle will be long before he is able to repay you, and the want of this sum may be a serious inconvenience to you, I fear."

"Oh! dear, no," replied Ned Hayward, with the easiest air in the world; "I shall have four thousand pounds left, which will enable me to get upon full pay again, and though this is a sad peaceful time we are in, I may have some opportunity afforded me. I had held this sum, which I put by, quite sacred, and would never touch a farthing of it, though I was very much tempted once or twice to buy a fine horse or a fine picture; but cut off as I am, my dear Miss Clifford, by my want of fortune, from forming those ties which are the comfort and happiness of latter years to most men, I may as well go and serve my country to the best of my power, as linger out my days in hunting, and shooting, and fishing, reading poetry, and looking at pictures. Sir John will pay me when he can, I know; for he will look upon it as a debt of honour; and, if he never can, why, it can't be helped. At all events, I do not wrong my heirs, for I have got none;" and he laughed right cheerfully.

Mary Clifford looked in his face with a smile; it was a sort of philosophy so new to her, so good, so generous, so

self-devoted, and yet so cheerful, that she felt strongly in-
 fected by it. She had been bred up amongst people and by
 people equally good, equally generous in all great things,
 but somewhat rigid in smaller ones; severe, if not stern;
 grave, if not harsh; and they had committed the sorrowful
 mistake of thinking, and of trying to teach her to think,
 that true piety is not cheerful. Her father had been the
 person from whose breast this spring of chilling waters had
 been welled forth; and Mary's mother, though originally
 of a gay and happy disposition, had been very much altered
 by the petrifying influence of the stream. The contrast,
 too, in Mrs. Clifford's case, between her brother and her
 husband; the one whom she might love, but could not re-
 spect; the other, whom she loved and respected—nay,
 somewhat feared—tended to clench the mistake which the
 dean had striven to implant; and to make her believe that
 cheerfulness and folly, if not vice, were companions rarely
 separate. Mary Clifford saw the mistake now, though her
 own heart had told her long before that an error existed
 somewhere. But she felt, at the same time, that she also
 had a part to play towards one who sacrificed so much for
 the nearest relation she had except her mother; and with
 a beaming smile upon her lips, she said:—

“Captain Hayward, I shall never forget your conduct
 this day; but, at the same time, you must not run any risk,
 nor be any loser. If I had any power over my own fortune,
 I would do what you are now kind enough to do; but, at
 all events, I give you my word, that, the moment I am of
 age, I will repay you.”

“Oh, I dare say Sir John will do that,” answered Ned
 Hayward; “but at all events, my dear young lady, pray
 say nothing to him on this subject till the last moment.
 We must let the matter press him very hard before he will
 hear reason; then, when he sees no means of escape what-
 ever, he will consent that others shall find one for him.
 You had better talk to his daughter, but enjoin her to se-
 crecy. If I have an opportunity, I will sound Beauchamp;
 I have a notion that he is rich; I feel very sure he is
 liberal and kind, and may take the mortgage if he finds it
 a reasonable security. That it is so, I am quite certain—nay,
 more, I am convinced, that if Sir John would let me ma-
 nage all his affairs for him for one year, I would remove all
 his difficulties, and leave him a better income, in reality,
 than he has had for a long while. But now I must run
 away and leave you, for I see the people are getting up,
 about the place, and I have two important pieces of bus-
 ness to do before noon.”

"Indeed," said Mary, struck by something peculiar and undefinable in his manner; "I hope nothing unpleasant?"

"I will tell you what they are," said Ned Hayward in a gay tone, "and then you shall judge for yourself. I have, first, to catch the largest trout in the river; I made a bet last night with your uncle that I would do so, and I always keep my engagements; and then I have to make ready for London to sell out this money."

"But need you go yourself?" said Miss Clifford, with a look of interest; "can you not send?"

"True, I can," said Ned Hayward; "I never thought of that—but yet, I had better go myself.—Good-by—good-by!" and he turned away. Then pausing for a moment, something which he struggled against got the better of him, and, coming back, he took Mary Clifford's hand in his, and pressed it gently, saying, "Farewell! There are some people, Miss Clifford, whose society is so pleasant, that it may become dangerous to one who must not hope to enjoy it long or often."

CHAPTER XVII

"WHAT hour does the coach start at for London?"

"Half-past four, sir."

"Arrives in town at twelve to-morrow, I think?"

"No, sir; last time I went up, we got there by eleven."

"Then down again at half-past four?"

"Yes, sir—gets to the White Hart at half-past eleven—longer coming down than going up."

"That will do very well." And Ned Hayward, who had held the above conversation with one of Sir John Slingsby's servants, hurried upstairs. His room was all in the most exact order. His fishing-tackle, two fowling-pieces in their cases, shot-pouches, game-bags, powder-flasks, &c., were in array on the top of the drawers. His clothes were all in their separate places, his boots arranged under the dressing-glass, his writing-desk upon the table, flanked on either side by half-a-dozen volumes. Everything could be found in a moment, so that if called upon suddenly to march, the baggage would require no time to pack. It was to the writing-desk he first went, however; he opened it, unscrewed the top of the inkstand, took out a sheet of note-paper and a memorandum-book, and then sat down deliberately in the chair. The memorandum-book was first called into service, and in the column of accounts he put down what he had paid at the inn that

morning, and then, on another page, wrote down the following list, which I will not attempt to explain.

- "Catch trout.
- "Write to H. W.
- "See Ste Gim.
- "Make inquiries.
- "Provide for boy.
- "Pack car. bag.
- "Coach to London.
- "Sell out 12,000*l*.
- "Alter will.
- "Pistols.
- "Friend—*qy*. Beauchamp.
- "Talk to him of No. 2 and No. 8."

When this was done, he put the memorandum-book in the pocket of a frock-coat, sat down again, drew the sheet of note-paper towards him, and on it wrote as follows, with a bold, free, rapid hand.

"Captain Hayward pre-ents his compliments to Mr. Henry Wittingham, and begs to inform him that since he had the honour of seeing him last night, some business has occurred which compels him to go to London for a short time. He goes by the coach this day at half-past four, returns by the coach which leaves London at the same hour to-morrow, and expects to arrive at the White Hart by half-past eleven or twelve. If by that time Mr. Wittingham has found some gentleman of honour to appear as his friend, Captain Hayward will have much pleasure in seeing that gentleman at the White Hart any time between the arrival of the coach and one o'clock. If not, he will be found for about a fortnight at Tainningham Park."

The note was then addressed and sealed, and as soon as that was done, without a moment's pause, Ned Hayward threw off the dress-coat in which he was still habited, put on a sporting costume, looked through his book of flies, and taking fishing-rod and basket in one hand, and the note in the other, descended the stairs.

The house was now in the bustle of morning preparation; housemaids were swceping, men-servants were taking away lamps and candlesticks, and to one of the latter the note was delivered, with a half-crown, and directions to send some lad immediately to Buxton's inn. That being done, Ned Hayward strolled out into the park, taking his way towards the stream, where we will join him bye-and-bye.

We must now return to Mary Clifford, however, who stood where Ned Hayward had left her in deep thought for several minutes. Had she been the least of an actress,

she would not have done so, for she might have fancied that it would betray to her companion, as he walked away, what was passing in her mind; but Mary was not the least of an actress. Graceful by nature, lady-like and polished by heart and education, it had never been necessary for her to picture to her own imagination what others would think of any of her movements or words. She was unaccustomed to do so. She never did it. She did not feel herself upon a stage; she was never acting a part. How few there are of whom we can say the same! But there she stood—silent, grave, and thoughtful, with Hayward's words still ringing in her ear, his manner still before her eyes; and both had been somewhat marked and peculiar. But three minutes were all that she would give to such thoughts. They came upon her in confused crowds—so numerous, so busy, so tumultuous, that they frightened her; and, not being very brave by nature, she ran away from them, to take refuge with the calmer but sterner meditations regarding her uncle's situation. What was to be done, and how it was to be done, were very puzzling questions, which she asked herself over and over again, without receiving any satisfactory reply from her own mind. Under the pressure of difficulties and dangers, whether affecting ourselves or those near and dear to us, there comes upon us a craving for action, a *cacoethes agendi*, which we can scarcely restrain. We cannot sit down quietly and wait for time and circumstances to present favourable opportunities, as we should do when the affairs in our hands were but matters of indifference to ourselves; calm, business-like transactions, in which we have no personal feeling. The heart comes in at every turn, and perplexes all the fine plans of the head; and we must be up and doing, whether the moment be favourable or not. Mary Clifford felt all this, and was, in some degree, aware of the unreasonableness of precipitancy. She thought it might be better to wait and see; and yet anxiety, eagerness, affection, urged her to do something, or try something, at least, for her uncle, as soon as possible. She could not rest under the load; she felt as if inactivity would be almost a crime; and though she could see no light whichever way she turned, yet she resolved to attempt something, not feeling very sure whether she should do injury or not.

Such was the course of her meditation, for nearly half an hour, after Ned Hayward left her; and yet it must be confessed that, though these meditations were upon painful subjects, they were not altogether painful. Did you ever listen attentively, dear reader, to one of those fine

and masterly pieces of Beethoven's music, where the great composer seems to take a delight in puzzling and perplexing the hearer, drowning him, as it were, under a flood of harmony, where discords are as frequently introduced as anything else? But still, through them all runs a strain of melody, which links them all together.

Such was very much the case of Mary Clifford. For, although the general train of her thoughts was sombre, and there was much cause for sadness in all she had heard, there was something very sweet—she herself knew not what—that mingled with the old current of reflection, and harmonised it beautifully. It was something hopeful, expectant, trustful—a belief that by the agency of some one all would go right. Was it love? Was it the first dawn of that which, to the young mind, is like the dawn of the morning, that softens and beautifies everything? I cannot tell; but, at all events, it was so far undeveloped, that, like the strain of melody which pours through the whole of a fine composition, giving a tone of richness and sweetness to every part, it was undistinguishable from the rest, felt and known to be there as a thing separate and alone, and yet inseparable.

Whenever she tried to distinguish it, fear seized upon her, and she flew away again. Why was she happy, when all that she had heard was the most likely to render her otherwise? She did not know, she would not know; but still she gave way to the feeling, although she would not give way to the thought; and while she shrank from clothing her own sensations in distinctness, longed to render them distinct, that she might enjoy them more fully.

"I will go and seek Isabella," she said, at length; "she must know of this; and then we can all consult together, perhaps, if one can but teach her light gay heart to be prudent and discreet—and yet," she continued, thoughtfully, "she has, perhaps, more worldly wisdom than myself, more knowledge of life and all life's things. Those who are accustomed to commune much with their own thoughts, gain, I am afraid, a conceit in their own opinion, which makes them undervalue those which are formed upon a practical knowledge of the world. Isabella is full of resources, and, perhaps, may devise many means that would never strike me."

These thoughts passed through her mind as she was approaching the house, and very soon after she stood in her cousin's dressing-room, finding her, even at that early hour, up and partly dressed.

"Why, dearest Mary," exclaimed Isabella, "where have

you got all those roses? The morning air must be very good for the health, as every one says, to change your cheek, which was yesterday as pale as twilight, into the very aspect of the dawn."

"I have been out walking on the terrace, more than an hour," replied Mary, "and I was pale yesterday, I suppose, from the fright of the night before. I have had a companion, too, Isabella," she continued, gaily, though her voice trembled a little; "Captain Hayward came up and joined me, and told me all his adventures of the night before."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Slingsby. "His adventures must be very wild and singular, I suppose; for his is just the spirit to seek them and to make the most of them when he has got them. But what has happened since, Mary?—We had all the details, you know, up to the period at which, like Don Quixote, he arrived at an inn."

"I do not think there is anything in the least like Don Quixote about him, Isabella," replied Mary Clifford, gravely; "if he seeks adventures, it is for the advantage of others."

"So did Don Quixote," replied her cousin, giving her a sly smile; "but what did he say, dear cousin?"

"Oh, there was a great deal besides what you heard last night," replied Miss Clifford; "you only had the sketch—the picture is still to be filled up, and he had better do it for himself. However, I have other things to talk to you about, Isabella, of more importance; and she glanced at the maid that was arranging her mistress's hair.

"I shall be ready in a minute," answered Miss Slingsby. "Make haste, Minette; I think you have been longer than usual this morning."

The maid, however, had a thousand reasons to give for being longer, all perfectly valid in her own estimation; and, whether out of spite, or in the hope that the two young ladies would be tired of waiting, and say plainly all they had to say, I cannot tell, but she contrived to occupy a full quarter of an hour more in dressing her mistress's hair. Those who calculate upon the difficulty of carrying a secret are rarely mistaken; but in this case Mademoiselle Minette did not arrive at her end. Mary said nothing more; and, at length, the girl was dismissed, and the two cousins were left alone together.

"In the name of fortune!" exclaimed Miss Slingsby, as soon as the maid was gone, "what solemn thing have you got to tell? Has he proposed already? On my word, it is a very speedy declaration!"

"Mary coloured like a rose, but answered gravely, "Dear Isabella, how can you be so light? If you speak of Captain Hayward, our conversation has been upon very different subjects, and was a very serious one. I am afraid I shall have to distress you, Isabella, as much or more than his information distressed me."

"I hope not," replied Isabella. "I did not know at all that he was a distressing person. I always thought him a very pleasant fellow, and imagined you thought so, too, dear cousin; but how has he contrived to distress you?"

"Why, by some news, of no very pleasant character," answered Mary Clifford. "He overheard, accidentally it seems, some conversation relating to your father, from which he learned some particulars that grieve me greatly to hear."

"Indeed!" cried Miss Slingsby, with a start; "they are not going to shoot at him, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mary; "nothing of that kind; but about his affairs generally."

"Well, speak out boldly, Mary dear," answered her cousin; "I see you are going round the matter for fear of vexing me; tell it at once, whatever it may be. You know I have a bold heart, not easily put down; and, though you judge me light and thoughtless, I know, believe me, Mary, it is more a necessity of my situation than anything else. If I were to think by the hour together over all the things that are unpleasant to me, as you or my dear aunt would do, I should only kill myself without altering them. Papa has his own ways, which were formed before I was born; and, coming so late in the day, I don't think I have any right to meddle with them. I get out of the way of all that is disagreeable to me as much as I can; and, when I can't, like a good, dutiful daughter, I submit. You know that he is, to use our good old gardener's expression, 'as kind as the flowers in May;' and I should be very ungrateful if I teased him by constantly opposing habits which I cannot change, and which are my elder brothers and sisters. My philosophy may be a bad one; but, pray leave it to me, Mary, for I could not be happy with any other."

Mary Clifford took her cousin's hand and pressed it kindly in her own. "I would not take it from you for the world," she said, "for I know and understand all you feel, and am quite well aware that you are performing the first of duties in endeavouring to make your father's house as happy for him as you can, while you don't suffer your own mind and manners to be tainted by customs you do not ap-

prove. You have had a hard part to play, dear cousin, and you have played it well; but it is not upon these subjects I come to speak to you, but upon one which, though perhaps of less vital importance, unfortunately affects the happiness of this life more: your father's means and fortune, which, I am sorry to say, from all I hear, are very much embarrassed."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Isabella, gazing anxiously in her face; and Mary went on, as delicately as she could, to tell her all that Ned Hayward had communicated. At first, the poor girl seemed overwhelmed, exclaiming, "Ten days before they call for such a large sum! Six weeks before the whole is finally gone from us! Good Heavens! Mary, what is to be done?"

In a moment, however, she rallied. "Well," she exclaimed, "I have been very blind—as blind as a great politician, Mary. A thousand things should have prepared me for this, that I now recollect—letters, and messengers, and intimations of various kinds. That sleek knave, Wharton, is at the bottom of it all; but he shall not crush me; and I dare say we shall do very well with what is left. I have jewels and trinkets of my own and poor mamma's, to keep house for a long time; and there must be something left out of the wreck."

"But the thing is, if possible, to prevent the ship from being wrecked at all," answered Mary Clifford; and she then went on to tell all that Captain Hayward proposed to do, in order to prevent any immediate catastrophe—not trusting her voice to comment upon his conduct for a moment.

But Isabella did it for her—"Oh, dear, kind, generous fellow!" she cried, "how I love him! Don't you, Mary? Although papa may have many bad and foolish friends, you see there are some noble and wise ones—but I'll tell you what, Mary, we'll go down and talk to him, after breakfast, and we'll all consult and see what is to be done; we'll have a plot to serve papa, whether he will or not; and I declare Mr. Beauchamp shall be one of the conspirators."

"Just what I would propose," answered Mary Clifford; "for, although you have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time——"

"A good deal longer than you have known Ned Hayward," answered Miss Slingsby, with a smile.

"Nay, nay—pray do be serious, Isabella," answered he, cousin; "I was going to say, though we have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time, I do believe—from

various traits I have seen—I do think he is an amiable and kind-hearted man, though perhaps somewhat cold and stately."

"Oh, he may be warm enough, for aught we know," replied Miss Slingsby—"but there is the breakfast-bell; papa will be down, and want his coffee."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Nobody could perceive at the breakfast-table that Sir John Slingsby had suffered from the strong emotions by which we have seen him influenced on the preceding night. No one could have conceived that his state and fortune were in the tottering condition which Ned Hayward had represented. He was as gay, as happy, as full of jest and merriment as a school-boy of seventeen. And as his sister was peculiarly cheerful, it seemed to excite in him even a more merry and jocund liveliness. To say the truth, Mrs. Cliford felt that her bond was broken; that her visit to her brother's house, and her stay with him, had unlinked one of the chains of cold and formal proprieties which had been wound round her for so many years. Heaven knows, she never wished to see, hear, or do, think, or countenance anything that was evil! but yet her heart felt freer and lighter—it had more room to expand. In fact, the sunshine of early days seemed to be reflected upon it, and it opened out to the light like a flower. She was gayer than her daughter, though silent and still, except when called into conversation by some lively sally; but she smiled, was good-humoured, and answered even merrily, when a jest passed round, and seemed to wonder at the more than wonted gravity of her Mary. Isabella was almost too gay; as gay as the habits of the world and her own sense of propriety permitted; but, to an observing eye, this cheerfulness was rather assumed than real; and to any one who, like Mary, had the secret of her heart, it was very evidently affected to cover a deeper and a graver current beneath.

"Well, what's the news this morning?" said Sir John, as Isabella poured out the tea and coffee; "a quarter to nine and no tidings stirring? This seems to promise a dull day. Nobody's mill been burnt down? Nobody's cat killed? Nobody's wife eloped? Nobody's daughter gone to Græna Green? Nobody's house been broken open, game stolen, hen-roosts been plundered, pocket been picked, or nose been pulled?—Faith, we shall never get through the four-

and-twenty hours without something to enliven us. All the objects of country life are gone. It seems to me that the world has turned as dead as a horse-pond, and men and women nothing but the weed at the top, waiting coolly in green indifference for the ducks to come and gobble them up. Lack-a-day! lack-a-day! if we had but Ned Hayward here to cheer us up! What can have become of him?"

"Oh, he has come back, my dear uncle," replied Mary. "I saw him on the terrace as I was taking my morning's walk."

"Then why is he not here?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "why is he absent from his post? What business has he at Tarningham Park, unless it be like a ray of the summer sunshine to make everything gay around him?"

"He told me he was going down to catch a trout," replied Miss Clifford; "he has some bet with you, my dear uncle, it seems."

"The boy is mad!—irretrievably gone! Bedlam or Saint Luke's, or some of those places they call a private asylum, is the only place for him now," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby. "What, gone down to catch a trout! without pausing to take either rest or breakfast, with his hands burnt, and a shot in his arm—so that fellow Gimlet said, they tell me."

"He seemed very well," answered Miss Clifford; "and he said he had his breakfast before he left the inn."

"I don't believe a word of it," answered her uncle; "that's just one of his old tricks, Mary; if there was anything to be done, he used never to mind breakfast, or dinner, or supper, or anything else; the matter was always done first, and then he did not mind a good dinner, and a bottle of claret, or even two, as the case might be. I never saw such a fellow! We used to call him 'thoughtless Ned Hayward;' but the fact is, he used to think more in five minutes than the rest of us altogether in four-and-twenty hours, and then he was free for the whole day—but here comes the letters and papers; we shall have some news now, and we shall have something to laugh at, wlib, or because of."

Thus saying, Sir John took the bag which was brought to him by the butler, opened it with a key attached to his watch-chain, and drew forth the articles it contained one by one. First came a newspaper in its cover—it was, I suppose, the "Times," by its bulk—then another and another. All these were laid down beside him; and next came the small packet of letters, and then, oh! how eager all were to devour the contents. Strange and mysterious

mixture of old rags and size, what a world of emotions have you conveyed about this earth! Not the most terrible stage that has ever represented to the eyes of admiring thousands the works of the poet, or displayed the skill of the actor, has produced such deep tragedy as you. How often has the sight of the thin folded sheet, with its strange, crooked, black hieroglyphics, overwhelmed the lightest and the gayest heart with heaviness and mourning!—how often changed the smile into the tear!—how often swept away the gay pageants of imagination, and memory and hope, and left the past all darkness, and the future all despair! But, on the contrary, how often have ye been the unexpected messengers of happiness and joy!—how often have ye brought sunshine and light into the benighted breast!—how often dispelled, in a moment, the dark thunder-clouds of the world's blackest storms!—ay, and sometimes, too, have closed, as with a lightning-flash, the black, tempestuous day of a long sorrowful life, with a gleam of ecstasy, too intense and potent to survive!

All eyes turned eagerly to Sir John Slingsby, while he looked over the letters. The first was in a stiff and clerk-like hand, which he put down beside him with a low chuckle, which probably indicated an intention of not reading it at all. The next displayed a scrawl, written as if with a butcher's skewer, thin, straggling, and irregular, like the scratching of a hen in the last agony. That met the fate of the former one. Then came an address in a good bold, dashing hand, with a name written in the corner.

"Ah, ah!" cried he, "from Tom South, about the borough of Twistandskin. Before I stand, I'll see him—Lord bless me! what was I going to say?" and putting his hand to his mouth, he looked to his sister with a low laugh; but that letter was put at a little distance from the two others. "Ah! Mr. Beauchamp, here is one for you," continued the baronet; "sent up with the postmaster's compliments!—d—n his compliments! who wants his compliments?" and he gave the letter over to Beauchamp, who was sitting at the opposite side of the table, next his daughter. "My dear Harriet, try that paste—it is excellent; or take something, in the name of Heliogabalus! This is not a fast-day, is it? There's the best ham that ever came out of Yorkshire on the sideboard. There, Isabella, there's an epistle for you, from one of your sweet, maudlin, blonde and satin friends in London, as soft and insipid as a glass of orgeat, I'll answer for it; full of loves, and dears, and sweet friends, and languishing for your darling society, and wondering what you can be doing in

the country, spending your beauty on the desert air. Don't let me hear a word of it; I hate them all; and, if I had my will, would smother them all to death under eider-down quilts. Pray read your letter, Mr. Beauchamp. Everybody in this world is anxious to read their letters but me; and as yours may very likely require an answer, you had better look at it at once, for our post here goes out at eleven."

Now, Sir John Slingsby, in the latter part of his speech, showed himself considerate; for Mr. Beauchamp, during the first part of breakfast, had borne a very grave and business-like air. He had given himself up, it is true, to a more cheerful spirit on the day before; he had been calmly cheerful at dinner,—gay in the evening, especially when he was near Miss Slingsby. But who is not gay in the evening hours, when the whole nervous fluid seems to have accumulated about the brain and the heart,—when the anticipated or actual labours of the day are over, the apportioned task of care and anxiety are done? The load of the four-and-twenty hours is thrown off, and we snatch at the brief portion that remains between labour and repose, for enjoyment. Who is not gay, when beauty and cheerfulness pour their mingled rays upon us, flooding our feelings and our thoughts with a bright, happy, and congenial stream? Take a glass of iced-water, dear reader—as cold as you will, so that it be not actually frozen—and pour into it a merry glass of warm champagne; see how it will sparkle and dance up to the brim; and unless the heart of man is a mass of ice indeed, such will be the effect upon it of mere association with youth, beauty, and innocent gaiety.

But since then, Beauchamp had slept upon the matter. The night before, he had gone on with the current; and now time had been afforded him to ask himself how far that current had carried him. He was doubtful whether he had not been borne too far; there were doubts, hesitations, apprehensions in his mind; and he was grave—very grave indeed. He had wished Miss Slingsby good morning, he had expressed a hope she had rested well, he had been most gracefully courteous—too courteous; for very polished surfaces are generally cold; and Isabella, who had come down with the intention of speaking to him frankly and freely upon matters that interested her deeply, had shrunk into herself more than was her wont.

Beauchamp opened the letter, however, with rather a languid and unexpectant air, but the first words seemed to rivet his attention. The eye of Isabella, without her will, or rather against it, fixed upon him. She saw his cheek

turn pale, then glow again warmly, and then a glad and well-satisfied smile curled his lip. He ended the letter, and, looking towards the ceiling, his lips moved for an instant; and, folding up the paper, he put it in his pocket, giving way for a few seconds to thought, which did not seem unsatisfactory.

Isabella Slingsby was the most straightforward girl in the world, by nature; and she had but one class of experimental teaching in regard to concealing her feelings. She could hide, occasionally, how much she disliked some of her father's guests; she could conceal from him how painful to her was much that she saw under his own roof. In everything else, however, she was as frank as the day; and, seeing Mr. Beauchamp receive a letter, and look not discontented with it, she said, somewhat inconsiderately:

"You seem to have had pleasant intelligence, Mr. Beauchamp?"

That gentleman turned his eyes suddenly upon her, and very fine and lustrous eyes they were, and he gazed at her for an instant with a smile so blended with many emotions, that Isabella, she knew not why, cast down her eyes, and coloured. After a brief pause, he replied:

"Not unpleasant, Miss Slingsby; for so strange a thing is the heart of man, or, rather I should say, so strange a thing is his fate, that, in the course of years and the change of circumstances, there will be pleasure even in the total ending of what we once believed might be happiness."

"That is because men are so fickle, I suppose," answered Isabella. "The only constant beings on earth are women and Newfoundland dogs, Mr. Beauchamp—it is so, I assure you, whatever you may think of it. I know the wicked world takes a different view of the subject; but the world is man's; and women might very well say, a different picture would be produced, 'if we lions were painters!'"

"Nay," answered Beauchamp, laughing, "I am not one of those evil speakers and slanderers. I have had time to observe, in a world where I have been these many years as a mere spectator, watching the characters of men and women; and I can justly say, that there are, at least, ten good women for one good man. Circumstances may have something to do with it; education, opportunity for good or evil; but still there must be a fine and pure spirit at the heart, teaching to avoid wrong, and to seek right."

"I believe, in truth, there is," answered Mrs. Clifford, joining in the conversation; "and that the bent of almost

every woman's mind is towards that which is good. But if you are the creatures of circumstances, Mr. Beauchamp, we are, in many respects, the creatures of your hands; you give the bent and the direction of somewhat more than half our thoughts, I am afraid, and are——"

"To be blamed, if you go wrong," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, with a loud laugh; "to be sure, to be sure; that is a woman's philosophy, my dear Harriet; all that she does good is her own—all that she does wrong is man's; but let me tell you, my dear sister, that there is no little doubt, in the minds of the best informed, which has the most influence; man over woman, or woman over man. I am of the last opinion; and I see it every day in my case and that of others. Here this girl, Isabella, rules me with a rod of iron—does anything she likes with me; but, by my faith, for this day I shall abstract myself from her authority; for I have some business to settle during the morning; and she must entertain her guests as she can. Mr. Beauchamp, if you leave my house during the next four-and-twenty hours, it will be a clear proof that Miss Slingsby does not entertain you properly; and I shall be very angry with her inhospitality, if I do not find you at lunch and dinner, tea and supper, and breakfast to-morrow morning; for I shall be quite sure that she has not made my house agreeable."

"An imputation that I should be the last to bring upon Miss Slingsby," said Mr. Beauchamp; and in truth he seemed to feel what he said; for when they rose from the breakfast-table, and the party sauntered to the window, in that pleasant indolence which generally succeeds the first meal of the day—that five minutes which succeeds to breakfast—in short, before we put on the armour of active exertion—he attached himself closely to Miss Slingsby's side, and engaged her in conversation so light and cheerful, that the whole character of the man seemed changed. Not that what he said was without thought; for there was a deep under-current of reflection running all the time, which gave it quite a different tone from what is called small-talk. It was sparkling, brilliant, even playful; but its principal effects on the minds of those who heard was to set them thinking. There was a marked attention in his manner towards Isabella Slingsby, which flattered her a little. She might have perceived before that he was struck with her beauty, that he admired her, that he liked her society, when he had met her at Dr. Miles's. She had thought him exceedingly agreeable, and had fancied that he thought her so, too; but there had been nothing said

or done—not one word, one look, one gesture, that could set imagination flying any further; and she had rested satisfied with letting things take their course, without any other feeling than a slight degree of regret that her father had not made the acquaintance of one so superior in manners and in mind to the generality of those around. During the preceding evening, Beauchamp had appeared in no other character than that of the calm, dignified, quiet, and well-informed gentleman. But after breakfast his attentions were more pointed; and Isabella felt a little agitated, and doubtful of what all this would come to. She was not fond of anything that agitated her; and, therefore, somewhat more abruptly than was necessary, she broke through the conversation which was going on, saying,—

“Mr. Beauchamp, Mary and I have entered into a compact to go down and see Captain Hayward win his bet.”

“What bet?” asked Beauchamp, who had forgotten all about it.

“To catch the largest trout in the river before twelve o’clock,” replied Isabella; “will you escort us? My dear aunt, won’t you come, too?”

“No, my dear,” answered Mrs. Cliford; “I have letters to write, too, like your father.”

“I have no letters to write,” exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, somewhat petulantly; “I wish I had nothing less pleasant to do; but I have to see the steward and a lawyer about business—the greatest bores on earth. I wish to heaven Peter the Great had been but autocrat of England for a bare month. Heaven and earth! how he would have thinned the roll of attorneys!—or if we could but bring them under the cutting and maiming act, what hanging and transporting we should have! I am sure they cut up our time and our comforts, maim our property, and cripple our resources. But the devil never abandons his own; and so they slip out of every noose that is made to catch them. There’s that fellow, Stephen Gimlet, can make, they say, springes that will catch woodcocks and snipes, hares, pheasants, partridges, ruffs, and rees; hang me if I don’t ask him if he has not got any trap that will strangle an attorney.”

“If he fails, ask Ned Hayward,” said Isabella, half jokingly, half earnestly; “I have no doubt he would furnish you with what you want.”

“Perhaps he would, perhaps he would,” answered Sir John; “not a bad thought, Bella; but hang it, I must go

and see the steward before that fellow Wharton comes. So good by, good by, for the present. Mind the luncheon time ; and if Ned loses and does not bring me home a trout of at least three pounds, we'll drink his health in a bottle of the old Hermitage—get your shawls and bonnets, get your shawls and bonnets ; and now, Harriet, if you want to send over to your place, be quick with your letters, for I have got a man going to Tarningham at twelve."

Mrs. Clifford left the room with her brother, and was followed immediately by her daughter and niece. Beauchamp walked out into the hall, and got his hat, gave some directions to one of the servants in regard to sending up some of his clothes from the inn at Tarningham, when anybody was dispatched to the town ; and then returned to the window of the breakfast-room. There he paused and looked out, revolving various things in his mind, and coming to the half-muttered conclusion, at length : "It must be so. It is quite clear—it is certain." But when any one determines that a thing is quite clear, is certain, before we agree with him in opinion we should know what other trains of thought are going on in his mind at the moment, jostling this idea and that out of their right places, leaving others far behind, and stimulating others again to run at lightning speed, who knows whither, to win their race. It is not at all impossible, that if you or I, dear reader, could see into Mr. Beauchamp's mind at this moment, we might come to a very different conclusion on the premises, and think that the proposition was anything but quite clear, the result not at all certain.

However that might be, there he stood with his hat in his hand, in very good spirits, when Miss Slingsby and her cousin appeared.

Isabella was rather fluttered, as we have said, about something or another ; she felt a timidity that was not usual with her, and she got her cousin between herself and Mr. Beauchamp before they reached the door, as if she intended that he should offer Mary Clifford his arm. Beauchamp manœuvred so skilfully, however, that before they were through the door and down the steps, he was by Isabella's side again, and, as she had two sides, one of which was certain to be unprotected, while that side was almost certain to be the point of attack to a dextrous enemy, she gave up the battle at once, and let things take their course.

The letter which Beauchamp had received at breakfast had evidently either pleased, or entertained, or relieved

him; but the effect was, that he was infinitely gayer when he set out than he had ever been since we have first met with him. He crossed the open ground by Isabella's side with a firmer and more elastic step, with his head high, and his shoulders back. He gazed over the wide-spread park scenery around, and seemed to snuff the air like a horse about to start upon a race. He commented upon the loveliness of such views, remarked how very English they were—how very seldom one ever saw anything similar in any other land—and seemed to enjoy the whole so highly, as to leave an impression that the pleasure of the walk was heightened by the society in which it was taken. When he came under the shade of the tall trees, his tone was somewhat changed; it became softer, more serious, more earnest; and so he went on, his thoughts seeming to receive a colouring from the scenery through which he passed, without losing their general character or particular train at the moment. It was evident through all that he was thinking of Isabella Slingsby; and though, with finished courtesy, he divided his conversation very equally—not quite—between her and her cousin, yet even when he was speaking to Mary Clifford, it was very evident that his words, or, at all events, his thoughts, were addressed to Isabella.

Mary said little, except just to keep up the conversation, and deprive it of anything like awkwardness; but she felt, and indeed nobody could help feeling, that Mr. Beauchamp's manner towards her cousin was too marked and particular to be mistaken. Isabella, on her part, gave way to all the gaiety of her heart, sometimes with bright and laughing sallies playing round Beauchamp's more earnest and deep-toned thoughts, sometimes yielding to the impulse which he imparted, and venturing into the deep waters of feeling and reflection, whither he led her, till, startled at herself, she took fright and retreated. She was very happy, too; secure in Mary's presence from anything that might agitate or alarm, she felt that she could give way to the pleasure of the moment; and even the knowledge of her father's situation, and of the dangers and difficulties that beset him, acted but as a softening and subduing power, which brought down her spirits from their habitual gaiety, and rendered her heart more susceptible of tenderer and deeper impressions.

Beauchamp felt that he was listened to, that he pleased, that he might be beloved. He had seen nothing coquettish about Isabella; he had heard a high character of her; he had been told by one, who had known her from childhood,

that she seemed lighter than she really was ; that if there was anything assumed, it was the gaiety ; that all the more profound things, which occasionally appeared in her character, might be trusted and relied upon ; and that the seemingly high spirits were but as the breeze, which ruffles the tree-tops without touching the depth of the forest. He felt sure, therefore, that she would not sport with him, if she believed he was in earnest, and he took care, that upon that subject she should have little doubt.

Thus passed away their walk ; and though Mary Clifford¹ would have given a great deal, had she dared to venture, to make Mr. Beauchamp a sharer in the secret of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, and ask the advice and assistance of one who had evidently gained much experience of the world, without being spoiled by the world, yet she knew not how to begin. A feeling of timidity came over her that stopped her ; and the course of the conversation—its sparkling rapidity at some times, its deep and intense feeling at others—gave no opportunity of introducing a subject entirely discordant, without forcing it in a manner both harsh and discourteous. She determined, therefore, as they approached the river, to leave the matter to Captain Hayward, whose frank straightforwardness, she thought, would soon either find or make an opportunity.

When they reached the bank, however, Captain Hayward was not to be seen ; but Isabella pointed to an elbow of the wood, which concealed a turn in the stream, saying that he was most likely higher up, and accordingly they walked on. As they were passing through the little path which cut through an angle of the woodland, they heard suddenly a loud exclamation, then a very ungentlemanly oath, and the next moment, as they issued forth, they saw Ned Hayward grappling with a tall, powerful man, in what may be called a semi-military dress. The two were, apparently, well matched, though few, either in strength, activity, or skill, could match our friend. But the stranger, whoever he was, practised a trick, which he thought likely to free himself from his adversary, even at the risk of his own life. He struggled hard, and in the struggle drew towards the brink. Ned Hayward made a violent effort to resist the impulse, and most likely would have been successful, for, if anything, he was the stronger man of the two. But a part of the green turf gave way, undermined by the course of the current, and both plunged in together into a deep pool, and disappeared for an instant in the water.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MAP is a very useful thing: I wonder what people did without it before it was invented. Yet there were great travellers in those days, too, both by land and water. Adam began the first mode of travelling, and Noah the second, and they managed very well without either chart or compass, so that it is evident those instruments are nothing but luxuries, and ought to be done away with. Nevertheless, I feel that I should be much better off, and so would the reader, too, if I could give here, on this page, a map of the county of —, just to show him the relative position of the place called Buxton's Inn and the little village of Coldington-cum-Snowblast, which lay nearly north-west of Buxton's Inn, and at the distance, by the road, of about six miles. The innkeepers charged seven miles' posting, because it was the seventeenth part of a furlong beyond the six miles. However, a dreary little village it was, situated on one of the two roads from Tarningham to London, which was, indeed, somewhat shorter than the other, but so hilly, so tiresome, so bleak, and so stiff, as the postboys termed it, that man and beast alike preferred the other road, and generally went to and from Tarningham by Buxton's Inn. Nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary that a pair or two of posters should be kept at Coldington, as that was the only direct road to several considerable towns; and though it was but an eight-mile stage, yet the cattle, when they had got over the hills, had no inclination to go further. The post-horses had engendered a public-house, which was designated by courtesy an inn, but it was a very solitary one, with very few visitors but those who took a glass of beer or spirits at the bar, and a chance mercantile traveller, who came to supply the two shops which ornamented the village, and slept there for the night.

At a very early hour of the morning, however, on the day of which we have just been speaking, a post-chaise drew up to the door with horses from Buxton's Inn; and a fresh relay was immediately ordered to carry the travellers on towards Bristol. A tall, powerful, showily-dressed man got out, with a lady closely veiled, whose costume spoke of Parisian manufacture; and while the portmanteaus and other articles of baggage were being taken into the doorway, to rest in peace till they could be placed

upon the new chaise, the gentleman paid the post-boy, and then asked if he was going back directly.

"In about an hour, sir," replied the man, touching his hat, with the air of one well satisfied with his fee.

But at this reply the traveller looked blank, and said, "Well, it does not matter. I must get some lad to run over across the moor with this note to Mr. Wittingham. Just see for some one, my good fellow. He shall have half-a-crown for his pains."

But the post-boy was not such a goose as to let the half-crown slip by him, and, with the most respectful air in the world, he assured the gentleman that he was quite ready to go that minute, and that he had only proposed to stay an hour because he did not know—how should he?—that the other wanted to send back.

The note and the half-crown were immediately given, the post-boy got into his saddle again, resisted the soft entreaties of the ostler to take a glass of something, and trotted away. No sooner was he gone, however, in the full persuasion that ere a quarter of an hour was over his two travellers would be on their way to Bristol, than the gentleman he left behind seemed to have suddenly changed his mind. The horses were countermanded, a room upstairs looked at, some breakfast ordered, and there he and his fair companion seemed disposed to pass the day. After a short but hearty breakfast, which was crowned by a glass of brandy, upon the strength of such an early drive, the gentleman himself sallied forth, saying to the lady, "I must see that fellow Stephen, and find out if he has peached. If he has, we had better get over the water for awhile, at all events, though they can prove nothing, I am sure."

"You will take your rash, wild ways, love," answered the lady, in a languid tone; "and then you are sure to get into a scrape." But the gentleman did not wait for the end of the admonition, leaving the room and shutting the door behind him.

We will stay with the lady, however, and a very pretty woman she was, though, indeed, there had been a time when she was prettier. She was certainly not less than four or five and thirty, with good, small features, and a complexion which had once been exceedingly fine. It had become somewhat coarse now, however, and looked as if the process of deterioration had been assisted by a good deal of wine, or some other stimulant perhaps still more potent. Her eyes were fine dark eyes, but they had grown somewhat watery, and there was an occasional vacancy in

them, a wandering uncertainty that bespoke either some intense pre-occupation with other subjects than those immediately in question, or some failure of the intellect, either from temporary or permanent causes. Her figure was tall and fine, and her dress very handsome in materials and make; but yet there was something about it too smart. There were too much lace and ribbon, too many bright and gaudy colours, too much flutter and contrast, to be perfectly ladylike. There was also a negligence in the way of putting it on—almost a slovenliness, if one may go that length, which made things nearly new look old and dirty.

Her air and manner, too, were careless and languid; and as she sat herself down on one chair, then moved to another, and rested her feet upon a third, it seemed as if something was continually weighing upon her mind, which wanted vigour and solidity enough to make even an effort to cast it off.

It was not that she seemed to mope at being left alone by her male companion, or that she felt or cared for his absence very much, although she evidently deemed his plans and purposes imprudent and perilous. Far from it: she was as gay, or perhaps gayer, when he was gone than before; sang a little bit of an Italian song, took a small note-book out of her bag, and wrote in it some lines, which seemed by their regular length to be verses; and then getting up again, she opened a portmanteau, brought forth a book, and began to read. She had not continued long, however, when she seemed to become tired of that also, and putting back the book again, gave herself up to thought, during the course of which her face was chequered with slight smiles and slight frowns, neither of which had the most pleasant expression in the world. There was a listlessness in it all, indeed a sort of careless indolence, which perhaps bespoke a disposition hackneyed and spoiled by the pleasures if not the pains of life.

The maid who carried away the breakfast things informed the landlady that "the woman up stairs was a taking on it easy, a sitting with her feet on one of the best chears." And although the good dame did not think fit to object to this proceeding, she mentally commented on it thus: "Them quality-folks is always giving themselves airs; but if she spikes my new kivers, I'll take it out in the bill, anyhow."

After this state of things had continued for somewhat more than an hour and a half, the gentleman came back, apparently in great haste, dripping like a Newfoundland

dog, and, calling to the ostler before he ran up stairs, directed him to put to the horses as soon as possible. Then, running up, he entered the room where he had left the lady, exclaiming,—

"Quick, Charlotte; we must be off like the devil!"

"Why, what's the matter, Moreton?" she said, without moving an inch. "You are all dripping wet; you have met with some adventure."

"And something else too," answered the gentleman. "I have met with that devil of a fellow again, and he recognised me, and tried to stop me, but I pulled him into the river, and left him there, getting to the other bank Heaven knows how! All I am sure of is, that I kept his head under water for two or three minutes; for he fell undermost. But I have not time to talk more now, for we must go as if Satan drove us, and I will tell you more as we roll along."

"I hope he is drowned," said the lady, with the sweetest possible smile; "it is an easy death, they say. I think I shall drown myself one day or other."

"Pooh!" said the gentleman. "But come along, come along! I have something to tell you of Charles; so make haste."

"Of Charles!" exclaimed the lady, starting up as if suddenly roused from a state of stupor, while a look of intense and fiery malignity came into her face. "What of him? Have you seen him? Did he see you?"

"I don't know," answered her companion. "But come along;" and taking up one of the portmanteaus as the chaise drove up to the door, he hurried down and sent up for the other. The lady followed with a quick step; for she now seemed to be all life and eagerness; and while the gentleman was paying the bill, she got into the chaise and beat the bottom of the vehicle with her small foot, as if impatient for his coming.

Before he could reach the carriage door, however, a man on horseback galloped quickly up, and, springing to the ground, caught the gentleman by the arm, exclaiming, "Why, hang it, Moreton, you have played me a scurvy trick, to go off and leave me before it was daylight."

"I could not help it, my dear Wittingham," replied the other. "I was obliged to be off; there is a d—d cousin of mine down here whom I would not have seen for the world. You must not stop me now, by Jove! for they have found out where I am, and I expect him to pay his respects very soon."

"Devil take it! that's unfortunate," cried Wittingham;

"I wanted you to go and call out that meddling scoundrel, Hayward, whom I told you of. He bolted into my room last night, and we had a regular set-to. I told him he was a blackguard, and he told me he had horsewhipped me once, and would horsewhip me again whenever he met me, if I could not get some gentleman of honour to arrange a meeting with him."

"Upon my life, I can't stay," cried the other, "though I should like to see you shoot him, too, if he is alive, which I have some doubts of; but stay," he continued, after a moment's thought, "I will find a man for you, and I will send him down without loss of time—Major Woolstapler. He has been lately in foreign service, but that's all the same, and he's a capital hand at these things; and, if you follow his advice, you will shoot your man to a certainty—he shall be down before three days are over; I am off for Bristol, and so up the Bath road to London. We shall get there to-night; and he will be down to-morrow or the next day early. He'll hear of you at Buxton's I suppose? Good-by, good-by." And he jumped into the chaise.

A moment after, as soon as the door was shut, he seemed to recollect something, and putting his head out of the window, he beckoned up young Wittingham, saying, in a low voice, "You'll need the bull-dogs, so I'll send you down mine. Tell Woolstapler to contrive that you have number one. It will do his business, if tolerably well handled—and I say, Wittingham, don't mention to any one that you have seen me either here or at Oxford. My cousin fancies I am in India still." Then turning to the postilion, he said, "Go on, and brush along fast. Sixpence a mile for good going."

Never was such an intimation given to a postilion without the horses suffering from it. I actually once made a Bavarian go seven miles and a half an hour between Ulm and Augsburg by the same process. I record it as amongst the memorable events of my life, proudly satisfied that no man upon earth ever did the same, either before or since. On the present occasion, the postilion, without fear, struck his spurs into the horse's side, laid the whip over the back of the other with that peculiar kind of gentle application which intimated that if the brown-coated gentleman did not get on as hard as his four legs would carry him, the instrument of propulsion would fall more heavily the next time; and away they went, at a pace which was a canter up hill, a trot down, and a gallop over the flat. Captain

Moreton leaned back in the chaise, and murmured, "We've cut them by Jove!"

"But what is to be the end of all this?" asked the lady, who seemed to be now thoroughly roused. "If that man is to go on for ever having his own way, I do not see anything that is gained. We cannot keep this up much longer, Moreton; and so you thought two days ago. I shall be compelled to come forward and claim the arrears of the annuity by actual want of money. You told me, when we were at the inn there, that you had but ten pounds left, and now you seem to take a different view of the subject. You men are certainly the most vacillating creatures in the world."

"Nay," answered Moreton, bowing his head with an air of persiflage, "ladies, it must be owned, are superior to us in that, as in everything else. Two or three months ago you seemed enchanted with your plan, and declared, though it had not answered yet, it would answer in the end. I only thought it would not answer for want of means, otherwise I was as well disposed towards it as you could be. Now, on the contrary, you are eager to abandon it, while I wish to pursue it, for this simple reason—that I have got the means of carrying it on, for some time at least, and see the greatest probability of success. You must recollect, my dear Charlotte, that this is not a matter where a few hundreds or a few thousand pounds are at stake, but many thousands a-year."

As usually happens—for nobody ever hears or attends to more, at the utmost, than the twentieth part of what is said to them—the lady's mind fixed upon one particular sentence, without listening to anything more, and she repeated, as if contemplating and doubting, "You have got the means!—you have the means!"

"Ay, indeed, I have," answered Captain Moreton, with a smile. "I have got the means; for while you were thinking I was doing nothing, I was shrewdly laying out my plans, by which I have contrived to screw full five hundred pounds out of that miserly rascal, Wharton. Was not that somewhat like a coup? With that we can live for some five or six months in Paris—economically, you know, my love—we must not have champagne and oysters every day; but we can do well enough; and before the time is out, the very event we wished to bring about will have happened; otherwise my name is not Moreton. I can see very well how matters are going. He is caught; for the first time in his life, really and truly captivated;

and, if we but take care to play our game well, he will be married and completely in our power within a few weeks. I know he will never be able to stand that; and there will but be one choice before him—either to buy you off at the highest possible price, or——”

“But me!” cried the lady; “if he had the diamond mines of Golconda he could not buy me! If he could coin every drop of blood in his heart into a gold piece, I would see him mint them all to the very last, and then refuse them all with scorn and contempt. No, no—I will bring him to a public shame and trial; I will make him a spectacle, have him condemned as a malefactor, break his proud spirit and his hard heart, and then leave him to his misery, as he has left me. For this I have toiled and longed; for this I have saved and scraped, like the veriest miser that ever worshipped Mammon in his lowest shape; for this I spared every sixpence, and lived in self-inflicted poverty and neglect till I last met you, Moreton—seeking only to hoard enough to keep me till this revenge could be accomplished; and often, very often since, I have been tempted to curse you for having, by the extravagance you taught and practised, squandered away the very means of obtaining all that I have longed and pined for.”

“You speak in a very meek and Christian spirit,” cried Captain Moreton, with a laugh; “but, nevertheless, I will not quarrel with it, Charlotte; for your revenge would serve my purposes, too. If we could but get him to commit himself beyond recall, I am his next heir, you know, my dear; and, therefore, the sooner he goes to heaven or Botany Bay the better for me. Don’t you think that we could contrive to get up a very well-authenticated report of your death in some of the newspapers, with confirmations of all kinds, so as to leave no doubts in his mind?”

“Moreton, upon my life I believe you are a fool,” cried the lady, bitterly; “would he not plead that as his excuse?—No, no; if I could so manage it, and Heaven or the devil send me wit, I care not which, to do it, I would contrive to make him fancy my death certain by small indications, such as none but himself could apply, and which, to the minds of others, would seem but frivolous pretexts if brought forward in his own justification. If you can help me to such a plan I will thank you: if not we must trust to fortune.”

“Good faith! I see no means to accomplish that,” cried Moreton.

“Now, then, let us talk no more about it,” answered

the lady; and, sinking back into the chaise, she relapsed into that state of seeming apathy from which nothing but passion had the power to rouse her.

"By the way," said Captain Moreton, after about a quarter of an hour's consideration, while the chaise rolled rapidly along, "all those things that you had in Paris—clock and chimney-ornaments and such things—what has become of them?"

"Oh, they are of little value, Moreton," said the lady; "a thousand francs would buy them all; the worth would not last you ten minutes at roulette."

"No," answered Moreton, taking no notice whatever of the bitterness with which she spoke; "but I was thinking that they might be more serviceable at hazard."

"What do you mean?" she asked, abruptly, fixing her eyes upon him.

"I want to know where they are," answered Captain Moreton, in a cool tone.

"Why, you know very well," she answered, sharply: "when I left Paris, two years ago with you, I told the girl, Jeanette, to take care of them till I came back. I dare say she has pawned or sold them long ago."

"That is the very thing," cried Moreton, rubbing his hands. "We will away to Paris with all speed; you will keep quite close; I will find out Ma'amselle Jeanette, and give her intimation that she may sell the things to pay her own arrears of wages; for that her poor dear lady will never come back to claim them."

"I see the plan," replied the lady, "but I fear it will not answer, Moreton; I had been living, as you know, in seclusion for a year before, and the very means that I took to make him think me dead will now frustrate your scheme for that purpose."

"I don't know that, Charlotte," answered her companion. "He has been making inquiries in Paris, I know; you were traced thither distinctly, and whether all clue was there lost of your proceedings neither I nor you can tell. But I'll tell you a story. When I was living at my father's place he had a particularly fine breed of pheasants, which regularly every year disappeared about the 8th or 9th of October, without the possibility of proving that any one had been into the copses. One day, however, when I was out early in the morning I saw a fine old cock, with his green and gold neck, walking along straight through a field towards the ground of a neighbouring farmer. Every two or three seconds down went the pheasant's head and then on he walked again. I watched him for a few minutes

over a hedge, then made my way through, put up the bird, and examined the spot where he had been. There I found a regular pheasant's footpath, and, nicely strewed along it, a line of barleycorns leading straight on to the farmer's ground, in the first hedge of which I discovered another portly bird, fast by the neck in a springe. Now, my dear Charlotte, we'll strew some barleycorns, and perhaps we may catch your bird in the springe; I mean, we'll throw out such pieces of information as will lead to the certainty that you were in the Rue St. Jaques two years ago; we will get Jeanette to sell things to pay her own wages with the best reason to believe you are dead; and if what I have heard is true, all that you have so long aimed at will be accomplished before two months are over."

"I see—I see!" answered the lady, and the chaise stopped to change horses.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE quiet little town of Tarningham was more quiet than ever about the hour of twelve each day; for, according to good old primeval habits, noon was the period for feeding. Men ate, beasts ate, and birds ate, and we all know that eating is a silent process. It is the greatest mistake in the world for doctors to tell you to talk while you are eating, or else it is the bitterest sarcasm. They must either mean that your digestion should be spoiled, or else that you are in the habit of talking without thinking. But we will make a sort of corollary of it. "Man should not think while he is eating, man should not talk without thinking; ergo, man should not talk at his dinner." Therefore the people of Tarningham were wise; for never was there such a silent set towards the hour of twelve o'clock when they were eating. Doctor Miles could hear his own foot fall with the most perfect distinctness as he walked along the High Street; and a good broad foot it was, with a square-toed shoe and a buckle in it.

But Doctor Miles did not attend to the sound of his foot-fall; he was, indeed, busily thinking of something else, with his eyes bent down—but not his head—he rarely bent his head—holding it upright and straight, and a little stiff, by the natural effect of mind on body. His meditations were very deep, so much so, that it required an extraordinary apparition to rouse him from his reverie. The sight, however, of a human being in the streets of Tarningham a little after twelve, was quite enough to produce that effect;

and at the distance of about two hundred yards from the door of the White Hart he was startled by beholding the diminutive form and somewhat contorted person of the poor little pot-boy, Billy Lamb, coming towards him with an empty jug in his hand. Nobody attended to Billy's meals. He got them how he could, where he could, and when he could. When all the rest were eating he was sent with a jug of beer here, or a pint of gin there, and came back to feed upon the cold remnants of what the rest had eaten warm, if, indeed, they left him anything; but yet the fat landlord, ostlers, stable-boys, and barmaids, all thought that Billy was very well off.

However that might be, there was Billy Lamb, the pot-boy, just before Doctor Miles, with an empty tankard in his hand; and the good doctor no sooner beheld him than he stopped, and, in a kindly tone, asked him how the world went with him. Now Doctor Miles was a great man in the neighbourhood, he had property of his own of some extent, which rendered the living that he held but an accessory to his principal means of subsistence. He did not live by the altar, but for the altar; and there are no such keen drawers of distinctions as the lower classes. Of this thing all clergymen may be sure, that he who makes a trade of his profession, who exacts the uttermost penny which he has a right to, and something more, who increases burial fees, and makes broad the borders of all his dues, will always be held in contempt. Of the butcher, the baker, and the grocer, the lower orders expect such things. The exaction of a farthing on half a pound more than is really just they know is a part of the privilege of the knife, the oven, and the scales. But with the ministers of a pure and holy religion, the grand and fundamental principle of which is charity and abnegation of self, they expect a high and a wide sense of benevolence, a large and disinterested view of the relations of a pastor and flock.

Luckily, both by position and inclination, Doctor Miles was exempt from all such reproaches. His necessities did not force him into meannesses, and his natural disposition would never have suffered him to fall into them, whatever his circumstances might have been. One heard nothing in his parish of enormous charges for "a brick grave," swollen surplice-fees, or any of those taxes upon death which would make a cholera, a plague, or a pestilence so rich a harvest, that the minister who would pray in his desk against plague, pestilence, and famine would be the grossest of hypocrites. He did not look upon his churchyard as the most valuable and productive part of his glebe,

to be manured by the corpses of his parishioners, and bear a cent. per cent. crop in monuments and grave-stones. The consecration of the bishop he did not look upon as fertilising the land for his own enrichment, but contented himself with the bare amount of the moderate fee awarded by the law, and neither asked nor received a penny more. Some of the neighbouring clergy called him a weak and prejudiced man, and exclaimed loudly against him for neglecting the interests, or, as they called them, "the rights of the church." But, somehow, his parishioners loved him, though he was rather an austere man, too, and never spared invective or exhortation in case of error and misconduct. The secret, perhaps, was, that they were convinced of his disinterestedness. He took from no man more than was his due; he required of no man more than he had the warrant of Scripture for requiring. His private fortune gave him the means of charity, and to that object all his private fortune was devoted. Every one in the neighbourhood knew that Doctor Miles could have a finer house, could keep a better table, could maintain a smarter equipage, but, at the same time, they were aware of two things—first, that his income was not as large as it might have been had he chosen to exact the uttermost farthing; and, secondly, that it was not for the purpose of hoarding his money that he did not spend it upon himself.

Thus, Dr. Miles, as well may be conceived, was very much revered in the neighbourhood; his rebukes were listened to, and sometimes taken to heart; his advice was sought, and sometimes followed; his opinions were always respected, if his injunctions were not always obeyed; and his severity of manner was very well understood not to imply any real harshness of heart.

The cap was off Billy Lamb's head in a moment, when he approached Dr. Miles: but he did not venture to speak to him till the doctor, after gazing at him for a moment, in a fit of absence, exclaimed, "Ah, William, how goes it with you? and how is your poor mother?"

"Oh, quite well," replied the youth, in his peculiarly sweet, low voice; "mother's better than she was, though she has never been well since poor Mary's death."

"How should she?—how should she?" exclaimed Dr. Miles; "these things, my man, affect young people but little, old people but little; for young people are full of their own life, and with them that consideration supersedes all thoughts connected with death; and old people are so full of the conviction of life's brevity, that the matter of a

few years more or less is to them insignificant. It is to the middle aged that the death of the young is terrible; it clouds the past with regrets, and the future with apprehensions. But I want to speak to your mother, Bill; she must forgive Stephen Gimlet, and try and help him, and be a comfort to him."

"I wish she would," said the boy, looking down; "I am sure Stephen is not so bad as people call him, and never would have taken poor Mary away, if people had not been so strict."

"I must talk to her," answered Doctor Miles; "but you may tell her, if you see her before I do, that Stephen is a changed man, and Sir John Slingsby has taken him for a gamekeeper.—Tell her, will you," he continued, after a moment's thought, "that the cottage on the moor has been burned down, and the poor little boy, Charley, would have been burnt in it, because there was no mother, nor other relation of any kind to help him, had it not been that a gentleman who is staying up at the hall came by at the time, and rescued the boy from the flames."

"Ah, I am sure that was the gentleman that was down here," exclaimed the pot-boy; "Captain Hayward they called him; for he was a kind, good gentleman as ever lived, and gave me enough for mother to put something by against the winter."

"That is no reason why he should be walking on the moor," said Doctor Miles, quickly. "However, I must talk to her, for the boy must not be left alone any more; and we must see what can be done. But now tell me, Bill, what wages do you get?"

"A shilling a-week and my victuals," replied the boy, in an unrepining tone; "it is very kind of Mr. Groomber, I am sure; and I do what I can; but that's not much."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles, with not the most affirmative tone in the world; "well, I'll come bye-and-bye, and see your mother; can you go down and tell her that I am coming?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the boy; "they give me a quarter of an hour to eat my dinner, so I can go very well; but I must go first to Mr. Slattery's, the doctor; for Mrs. Bilter told me to bid him come quietly to Mr. Wittingham, as if just for a call; for the old gentleman came home ill last night, and has taken to his bed."

"Mr. Slattery is out," replied Dr. Miles. "I met him on the road; but leave the message, Bill, leave the message, and I will go up and see Mr. Wittingham myself."

Thus saying, he bade the boy adieu, and walked on to

the smart white gates of Mr. Wittingham's highly-cultivated place, and, passing through the garden, rang the bell at the door, which was opened to him by a servant in a straight-cut blue coat, black and yellow striped waistcoat, and black plush breeches, with drab gaiters.

In answer to Doctor Miles's inquiry, the servant informed him that Mr. Wittingham was in bed, and could see no one; but the worthy gentleman pressed for admission, saying that his business was of importance. A consultation then took place between the man-servant and the housekeeper, and, after some hesitation, Mrs. Billiter went up to her master to inform him of Doctor Miles's visit, with a particular injunction to impress upon the mind of the sick man that the clergyman's business was of moment. She came down the next minute and begged the visitor to walk up, with as low a curtesy as her long stiff stays would permit her to make; and, she leading the way, Doctor Miles followed with a slow and meditative step.

The room door was gently unclosed, and the clergyman, entering, fixed his eyes upon the figure of Mr. Wittingham as he lay in the bed, and a sad sight it was. Terrible was the effect that one night of sickness had wrought upon him. The long, thin, bony limbs were plainly visible through the bed-clothes, and so far, Mr. Wittingham well, or Mr. Wittingham ill, showed no difference; but in the face upon the pillow were to be seen traces enough, more of suffering than sickness. The features had suddenly grown sharp, and the cheeks hollow; the eye was bright and wandering, the brow furrowed, and the hue of the complexion, partly from the light-brown moreen curtain of the bed—the most detestable curtains in the world—partly from a sleepless, anxious, suffering night, had grown yellow, if not cadaverous. Patches of short-cut gray hair, usually concealed by the wig, were now suffered, by the nightcap, to show themselves upon the temples. The large front teeth, the high nose, and the protuberant chin, were all more prominent than usual; and certainly Mr. Wittingham, in cotton nightcap and clean linen sheets, was not the most prepossessing person that ever the eye rested upon. Doctor Miles, however, advanced quietly to his bedside, and opened the conversation in a kindly tone.

"I am sorry to find you ill, my good friend," he said; "you seemed well enough last night."

"Ay, ay, that's another thing, doctor," replied the invalid; "but I got a terrible fright after that, and that has given me quite a turn."

"As to the way you will direct that turn," answered the

clergyman, "you will need some good advice, Mr. Wittingham."

"Ay, ay," said the magistrate, somewhat impatiently. "Billiter there has been boring me for an hour to send for that fellow Slattery; but I don't think he could do me any good. He is a humbug, as well as most of those doctors."

"But not more than most," answered Doctor Miles, "which is a great thing in this part of the country. You may go, Mrs. Billiter; I wish to be alone with Mr. Wittingham."

Mrs. Billiter, who had remained upon the best, the oldest, and most invariable excuse, that of putting the room in order, for the purpose of gaining an insight into all that took place, dropped a curtsy, and withdrew unwillingly.

Mr. Wittingham eyed Doctor Miles with a shrewd, inquiring, but timid glance. It was evident that he would have dispensed with the doctor's coming, that he did not half like it, that he wished to know what he could want, why he came, what was his business, what could be his object, and why his manner was so grave and cautious. Heaven knows that Mr. Wittingham was not an imaginative man—that he was not subject to the sports of fancy, and seldom or ever presented to his mind any image of things, past or future, unless it were in a great parchment-covered volume, in which was inscribed in large letters, upon the last page: "Balance, in favour of Mr. Wittingham, sixty-nine thousand odd hundred pounds." Nevertheless, on this occasion the worthy gentleman's imagination ran restive; for, as a weedy old horse, when people endeavour to whip it into anything more than its ordinary pace, turns up its heels, and flings them into the face of its driver, so did Mr. Wittingham's fancy at once assert its predominance over reason, by presenting to him for his choice, every possible sort of business upon which Doctor Miles might, could, would, should, or ought to have come to Tarningham Lodge. He, therefore, sat in his bed with his nightcap on his head, grinning at him, like Yorick's skull, with a ghastly smile. Courtesy has its agonies, as well as other things; and the politeness of Mr. Wittingham was agonising. Speak he could not, that was out of the question; but, with a grim contortion of countenance, he motioned the worthy doctor to a chair, and the other took it with a provoking deliberation, concealing, under an air of imperturbable coolness, a certain degree of embarrassment, and a considerable degree of feeling.

To tell the truth, he much desired that Mr. Wittingham should begin first; but he soon saw that there was no hope

of such being the case ; and his profession had accustomed him to the initiative. Wherefore, after three preliminary hums, he went on to say, " My dear sir, I thought it better to come down to you to-day, to speak to you on a somewhat painful subject, but one which had better be grappled with at once ; and that rather in conversation with me, a minister of peace and good-will towards men, than with others, who, though equally bound by the injunctions of the religion which I unworthily teach and they believe, have what they consider duties apart, which might interfere with an unlimited exercise of Christian charity."

Excellent Doctor Miles, you are keeping the poor man in a state of torture. Why will you preach, when you are not in the pulpit ? But Doctor Miles was not a provy man by nature ; he was short, brief, and terse in his general conversation, and only preached when he was in the pulpit or in embarrassment. That such was the case at present greatly increased the evils of Mr. Wittingham's position ; and when the doctor was talking of Christian charity, the sick magistrate was mentally sending him to a place where very little charity of any kind is supposed to be practised—not that we know anything of the matter ; for even in the present day, with steamboats, railroads, and all the appliances of human ingenuity to boot, tourists and travellers have not pushed their researches quite as far as the place alluded to—or, at all events, have not favoured the world with an account of their discoveries.

After the above proem, Dr. Miles stumbled for a moment or two, and then recovering himself, continued thus :—

" The unfortunate affair which took place last night must doubtless give rise to legal inquiries, which will, depend upon it, be pursued with great energy and determination ; for Captain Hayward, I find, followed the unhappy young man at once ; and, if I judge rightly, he is not one to abandon his object when it is but half attained."

" Oh, that Captain Hayward—that Captain Hayward !" cried Wittingham, angrily ; " he is always meddling with other people's affairs."

" Nay, my dear sir," answered Dr. Miles ; " this was his affair, and the affair of everybody in the room. The ball passed within an inch of his friend Mr. Beauchamp's head, and might have been intended for him—at least, so Captain Hayward might have supposed, had not your own exclamation at the moment——"

" My exclamation !" cried Mr. Wittingham, with a look of horror ; " what did I exclaim ?"

" Doctor Miles did not answer him directly at first, replying merely, " You said enough, Mr. Wittingham, to show who it was, in your opinion, that fired the shot."

Mr. Wittingham clasped his hands together in an agony of despair, and sunk with his head upon the pillow, as if he would fain have hid his face in the bed-clothes ; but Dr. Miles went on kindly to say :—

" Moreover, my dear sir, your exclamation was sufficient to make me feel for you deeply—to feel for you with sincere compassion, and to desire anxiously to serve and assist you."

Now, Mr. Wittingham was not accustomed to be compassionated ; he did not like the thing, and he did not like the word ; he was a vain man and a proud man, and compassion was a humiliation which he did not like to undergo ; but still anxiety and trouble were the strongest, and he repeated two or three times, in a quick, sharp voice,—

" What did I say ?—What did I say ?"

" You said that it was your son," answered the clergyman ; " and various corroborative circumstances have transpired which——"

But by this time Mr. Wittingham was in such a state of agitation, that it was evident he would hear nothing further that was said to him at the moment, and therefore the good doctor stopped short. The magistrate covered his eyes ; he wrung his hands hard together ; he gazed forth at the sky ; he even wept.

" Then it is all over—all over," he cried, at length—" it is all over." By which he meant, that all his dreams of importance, his plans of rural grandeur and justice-of-the-peaceism, his " reverence" on the bench, and at the quarter-sessions, his elevation as a country gentleman, and his oblivion as a small trader, were all frustrated, gone, lost, smothered, and destroyed by his son's violent conduct, and his own indiscreet babbling in the moment of fear and grief.

" Ah, Doctor Miles," he said, " it's a sad business—a sad business ! As you know it all, there is no use of my holding my tongue. Harry did do it ; and, indeed, he told me before that he would do it, or something like it ; for he came here—here, down into Tarningham, and told me on the very bench, that if I pushed that business about Mrs. Clifford's carriage any further, it should go worse with me. It was a threat, my dear doctor ; and I was not to be deterred from doing my duty by a threat, and so I told him,

and immediately took up the man they call Wolf, on suspicion; for Sir John had been down here, swearing at my door—and what could I do, you know?”

“I think, my dear sir,” he said, “that you have made some mistakes in this matter. I do not presume to interfere with any man’s domestic arrangements, but I will candidly acknowledge that I have thought, in watching the progress of your son’s education, that it was not likely to result in good to his character—nay, hear me out; for I am only making this observation as a sort of excuse, not so much for him, as for the advice I am going to give you, which can only be justified by a belief that the young man is not so depraved by nature as by circumstances.”

They were hard words—very hard words, that Doctor Miles uttered, but there was a stern impressiveness in his manner which overawed Mr. Wittingham, kept down his vanity from revolting against the implied accusation, and prevented him from even writhing openly at the plain terms in which his son’s conduct was stigmatized.

“Under these circumstances,” continued Doctor Miles, “I think it much better that you send your son out of the country as fast as possible: afford him such means as will enable him to live in respectability, without indulging in vice; warn him seriously of the end to which his present courses will lead him, and give him to understand that if he abandons them and shows an inclination to become a good and useful member of society, the faults of his youth may be forgotten, and their punishment be remitted. On the latter point, I think I may say that, should he at once quit the country, no further steps against him will be taken. You know very well that Sir John Slingsby, though hot and irascible, is a very kind and good-natured man at heart.”

“Sir John Slingsby!” exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, bustling up with an air of relief, as if something had suddenly turned a screw, or opened a safety-valve, and delivered him from the high pressure of Doctor Miles’s grave and weighty manner; “Sir John Slingsby, sir, dare do nothing against me or mine; for there is a balance against him. He may talk, and he may bully, and crack his jokes. I have submitted to all that a great deal too long, without requiring a settlement of the account,—and there’s five thousand pounds against him, I can tell you, which he will find it a difficult matter to pay. I have a notion—ah, ah, Doctor Miles, I know what I am about. Five thousand pounds are five thousand pounds, Doctor Miles—and I know all the situation of Sir John’s affairs, too; so he

had better not meddle with me : he had better not enrage me ; for he will risk less in letting all this foolish business pass off quietly without inquiry, than producing inquiry into his own affairs in the county. A good jolly gentleman, I don't mean to say he is not ; but I can tell you he is tottering on the verge of ruin, and I don't want to force him over unless he drives me : and so he had better not—that's all !"

Doctor Miles had gazed at him as he spoke with a keen, subacid smile, and in some degree even of amusement ; and this calm, supercilious look greatly annoyed and embarrassed Mr. Wittingham towards the end of his tirade. It was evident that Doctor Miles was not in the least taken unprepared, that the intimation of Sir John Slingsby's position in worldly affairs neither surprised nor disappointed him in the least ; and when Mr. Wittingham at length stopped in some embarrassment, his reply tended still further to puzzle and confound the worthy magistrate, for he merely said,—

"Perhaps so, Mr. Wittingham, but I do not think Sir John Slingsby's pecuniary circumstances will at all prevent him from performing his public duties. If he has reason to believe that your son is in the road to amendment, he is very likely to look over his present offences, as they are, in some degree, personal to himself and his family. If he imagines that he will go on from one crime to another, depend upon it he will think it only right to cut his career short at once. The only fear is, that if this debt which you speak of ever crosses his mind, it will only serve as a bar to his lenity ; for no man is so likely to be seized with a sudden determination to punish with the utmost rigour, if he suspect for one moment that his debt to you, whatever the amount is, may be assigned as the motive by any one for his forbearance. I would not advise you to urge such a plea, Mr. Wittingham ; but, depend upon it, if this debt is considered at all, it will be considered to your disadvantage. Besides all this, you must recollect that other persons were present ; therefore Sir John has not the whole matter in his own hands. However, I have given you the best advice in my power ; you can take it, if you like ; if not, the consequence be upon your own head ; and you must not blame any one for anything that may occur in the due course of law."

And, rising from the bed-side, he was about to depart, when Mr. Wittingham stopped him.

"Stay, stay, my dear sir," said the magistrate, eagerly ; "let us discuss this question a little further. I wish no

harm to Sir John Slingsby, and I trust he wishes none to me. But are you sure there were other persons who heard the words I spoke? Very unfortunate—very unfortunate, indeed."

Now the truth was, that Mr. Wittingham was in a state of high irritation. The comments which Dr. Miles had made, or rather the hints which he had thrown out in regard to the education of his son, had greatly exasperated him. He never liked it to be even hinted that he was wrong; it was a sort of accusation which he never could bear; and the worthy doctor would have been permitted in patience to proceed with any other of Mr. Wittingham's friends or enemies without the least interruption; but it was natural that he should take fire in regard to his son. Why natural? it may be asked. For this reason, that the education of his son was associated intimately with Mr. Wittingham's own vanity; and the idea of his faults being owing to education, was a direct reflection upon Mr. Wittingham himself.

Doctor Miles, however, regarded none of these things; and though the worthy magistrate desired him to stay, he declared he had no time, saying,—

"Further discussion is out of the question. I have given you advice that I know to be kind, that I believe to be good. Take it, if you judge so; leave it, if you judge otherwise. Pursue what course you think best in regard to Sir John Slingsby; but, at all events, do not attempt to influence him by pecuniary considerations; for be assured that, although he may, by imprudence, have embarrassed his property, he has not arrived at that pitch of degradation which is only brought on, step by step, from the pressure of narrow circumstances, and which induces men to forget great principles in order to escape from small difficulties. Good morning, Mr. Wittingham;" and, without further pause, Dr. Miles quitted the room, and walked down stairs. In the hall he met Mr. Wharton, the attorney, going up, with a somewhat sour and discontented face; but all that passed between the two gentlemen was a cold bow, and the clergyman left the house in possession of the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXI.

It is a very unpleasant position indeed to be above your neck in the water, with another man holding fast by your collar, especially if it be by both hands. It may be a friend

who has so got you, it may be an enemy; but the operation comes to pretty nearly the same thing in both cases; and that the result is not at all an agreeable one, I say it boldly, and without fear of contradiction; for, although drowning is said to be accompanied by no real pain, and I have heard many half-drowned persons declare that it is rather pleasant than otherwise, yet that is only a part of the process, not the result; then, again, excellent Sir Peter Laurie can witness, that there are multitudes of persons, who, after having taken one suffocating dip in Mother Thames, repeat the attempt perseveringly, as if they found it very delightful indeed; but still I contend that they have not come to the end of the thing, and, therefore, can give no real opinion. "To lie in cold obstruction and to rot," to become the prey of the lean, abhorred monster, Death, to separate from the warm tenement in which our abode on earth has been made, to part with the companionship of all the senses and sensations, the thrills and feelings, which have been our friends, our guides, our monitors, our servants, our officers, in the course of mortal existence—this is the result of that tight pressure upon the cravat or coat-collar which we shrink from, when, with our head under the water, we feel the fingers of friend or enemy approaching too near the organs of respiration. If the gentleman grasps our legs, we can kick him off; if he seizes our hands, we can often shake him away; but the deadly pressure upon the chest and neck, the clinging, grasping energy of those small digits on the throat, when we find that half a second more and life is gone, is perhaps as unpleasant a thing as often falls to the lot of mortal man to feel.

Now Ned Hayward, I have endeavoured to impress upon the reader's mind, was a brave, bold, determined fellow as ever lived. There was no danger he would not have fronted—no fate he would not have risked for a good and worthy object. He was a good swimmer, too; but when, after a headlong plunge into the water, he felt himself undermost in the fall, out of his depth, his feet entangled in a weed, and the fingers and thumbs of Captain Moreton tight upon his throat, he was seized with an irresistible propensity to knock him off by any means, even at the risk of losing his prisoner. The first method that suggested itself was a straightforward blow at his adversary, and that taking effect upon his chest, was successful with a man half-drowned himself. His antagonist let go his hold, rose as fast as he could, dashed at the other bank, gained the ground, and was off. Poor

Ned Hayward, however, soon found that if he had freed himself from one enemy, he was still in the power of another. It is a terrible thing that a strong, powerful man, instinct with every energy and quality of high animal life, and, moreover, having an immortal soul, to be kept or parted with, should every now and then be completely at the mercy of a thin, pitiful, pulpy weed, which, to all appearances, might be broken in a moment. But moments are very important things, and the *vis inertiae* a tremendous power. The weed made no attempt to hold the young gentleman—it neither grasped his legs, nor clasped his knees, but it was carried by the current around the ankles of Ned Hayward, and there, somehow or other, it stuck fast, preventing him from moving; in fact, it was like many a great politician (in the world's opinion), who operate many great changes upon their neighbours by mere *vis inertiae*, waiting till the tide of circumstances brings them to action, and then holding fast to a particular point till all opposition is drowned.

Such had well-nigh been the case with Ned Hayward; for what little strength he had left was nearly expended in the blow he gave to Captain Moreton; and when he found that his feet were entangled in a weed which would not have snapped a single gut-line with a May-fly at the end of it, his powers did not suffice to tear himself away. This history, as far as he was concerned, seemed likely to come to a hasty conclusion, when suddenly he found a strong hand grasp his arm just below the shoulder, and give his whole frame a vehement impulse towards the surface of the water. The next instant he saw, heard, breathed, once more; and before he had time to do either of these things above a second, he found his right elbow leaning on the bank, and Mr. Beauchamp, who was not very well aware whether he was dead, alive, or half-drowned, endeavouring to draw him up on the bank. To use the words of the poet—in a very indecent episode of a very chaste and beautiful poem,—

“One stupid moment motionless he stood;”

but the next puff of the right element which went into his lungs recalled all his activity, and up he jumped on the bank with a spring which astonished Beauchamp, made Isabella Slingsby draw back, and brought a faint colour into Mary Clifford's cheek. The glow was accompanied by a smile, however, which showed that this proof of Ned Hayward's still active powers was not unpleasant to her.

The first thing the young officer did, however, was to shake Mr. Beauchamp warmly by the hand, exclaiming,—

"Upon my life you were just in time—it was nearly over with me—I could not have stood it half a minute longer. Everything was turning green, and I know that's a bad sign."

The next thing was to pick up his fishing-rod and tackle, crying, as he raised them from the ground,—

"He has frightened away that big old trout; I should have had him in another second; I may have to walk half an hour more before I find such another; I could see him eyeing the fly all ready for a rise."

"But who was the gentleman?"

"What was the quarrel about?"

"Why did you seize him?" demanded Isabella, Mary, and Beauchamp, all together.

Let the reader remark, that each framed his question differently.

"That is the man who fired the shot into the window last night," replied Ned Hayward, looking curiously at the fly upon his hook; and two of his companions instantly turned their eyes in the direction which Captain Moreton had taken, with a look of alarm, as if they feared he would fire another shot from the bushes amongst which he had disappeared. Beauchamp, for his part, cast down his eyes, and said nothing—not a word! Nay, more—he shut his teeth close, and drew his lips over them, as if he were afraid he should say something; and then, after a minute's pause, he turned to Ned Hayward, saying,—

"Had you not better give up this fishing, come up to the house, and change your clothes?"

"Oh dear, no!" cried Ned Hayward, "on no account whatever; I'll catch my fish before twelve o'clock yet; and very likely have the very fellow that our plunge scared away. Do you know, Beauchamp, it is sometimes not a bad plan to frighten a cunning old speckled gentleman like this, if you find that he is suspicious and won't bite. I have tried it often, and found it succeed very well. He gets into a fuss, dashes up or down, does not know well where to stop, and then, out of mere irritation, bites at the first thing that is thrown in his way. Come along, and we shall see. He went down, I think, for I had an eye upon him until he darted off."

"But you are very wet, too, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella. "If Captain Hayward is too much of an old campaigner to change his clothes, I do not see why you should neglect to do so."

"For the best reason in the world, my dear Miss Slingsby," replied Beauchamp, "because I have no clothes here with which to change these I have on."

"But there are plenty at the house," replied Isabella, eagerly.

"But I am afraid they would not fit," replied Beauchamp, laughing. "I am in no fear, however; for I am as old a campaigner as Captain Hayward."

"Let us move about, at all events," said Mary Clifford; and following Ned Hayward down the stream, they watched his progress, as he, intent apparently upon nothing but his sport, went flogging the water, to see what he could obtain. Three or four very large trout, skilfully hooked, artistically played, and successfully landed, soon repaid his labour; but Ned Hayward was not yet satisfied; and at length, he paused abruptly, and held up his finger to the others as a sign not to approach too near. He was within about twenty yards of a spot where the stream, taking a slight bend, entered into a sort of pass between two low copses, one on either hand, composed of thin and feathery trees, the leaves of which, slightly agitated by the wind, cast a varying and uncertain light and shade upon the water. The river, where he stood, was quite smooth; but ten steps further, it fell over two or three small plates of rock, which scattered and disturbed it as it ran, leaving a bubbling rapid beyond, and then a deep, but rippling pool, with two or three sharp whirls in it, just where the shadows of the leaves were dancing on the waters. Ned Hayward deliberately took the fly off the line and put on another, fixing his eye, from time to time, on a particular spot in the pool beyond. He then threw his line on the side of the rapid next to him, let the fly float down with the tremulous motion, kept it playing up and down on the surface of the foam, with a smile upon his lips, then suffered it to be carried rapidly on into the bubbling pool, as if hurried away by the force of the water, and held it for a moment quivering there; the next moment he drew it sharply towards him, but not far. There was an instant rush in the stream, and a sharp snap, which you might almost hear. The slightest possible stroke of the rod was given, then the line ran rapidly off, while the patriarch of the stream dashed away with the hook in his jaws. The instant he paused, he was wound up, and drawn gently along, and then he dashed away again, floundered and splashed, and struck the shallow waters with his tail, till, at length, exhausted and half-drowned, he was

drawn gradually up to the rocks ; and Ned Hayward, wading in, landed him safely on the shore.

"This is the game of life, Miss Clifford," he said, as he put the trout of more than three pounds weight into the basket. "Rendered cautious and prudent by some sad experiences, we shrink from everything that seems too easy of attainment : then, when we find something that Fate's cunning hand plays before our eyes as if to be withdrawn in a moment, we watch it with suspicious but greedy eagerness, till we think a moment more will lose it for ever, then dart at it blindly, and feel the hook in our jaws."

Mary Clifford smiled, and then looked grave ; and Isabella laughed, exclaiming,—

"The moral of fly-fishing ! And a good lesson, I suppose, you mean, for all over-cautious mammas—or did you mean it was a part of your own history, Captain Hayward, retrospective or prophetic ? or was it a general disquisition upon man ?"

"I am afraid man is the trout," said Beauchamp ; "and not in one particular pursuit, but all ; love, interest, ambition, every one alike. His course and end are generally the same."

"That speech of yours, fair lady, was so like a woman," said Ned Hayward, turning to Miss Slingsby, "if it were not that my hands are wet, I would presume upon knowing you as a child, and give you a good shake. I thought you had been brought up enough with men, to know that they are not always thinking of love and matrimony. You women have but one paramount idea—as to this life's concerns I mean—and you never hear anything without referring it to that. However, after all, perhaps it is natural :—

'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart—'

'Tis woman's whole existence.'

"Too sad a truth," replied Mary Clifford, thoughtfully ; "perhaps it is of too little importance in man's eyes—of too much in woman's."

"And yet how terribly she sometimes trifles with it," said Beauchamp, in a still gloomier tone.

"Perhaps you think she trifles with everything, Mr. Beauchamp ?" rejoined Isabella ; "but men know so little of women, and see so little of women as they really are, that they judge the many from the few ; and we must forgive them. Nevertheless, even if it be true that women do trifle with love, it is not the least proof that they do not,

feel it. All beings are fond of sporting with what is bright and dangerous: the moth round the candle, the child with the penknife, and man with ambition."

"All mankind," said Ned Hayward, "men and women alike, get merrily familiar with that which is frequently presented to their thoughts. Look at the undertaker, or the sexton, how he jests with his fat corpse, and only screws his face into a grim look when he has the world's eye upon him; then jumps upon the hearse and canters back, to get drunk and joyous at the next public-house."

"Hush! hush! Captain Hayward," cried Isabella. "I declare your figures of speech are too horrible; we will have no more of such sad conversation; can we not talk of something more pleasant as we go back?"

"I don't know," said Ned Hayward; "I am in a moralizing mood this morning."

And as Isabella and Mr. Beauchamp walked on a little in advance to pass the narrow path, which only admitted two abreast, he continued in a somewhat lower tone, saying to Mary Clifford,—

"I cannot get my spirits up this morning. The dangerous circumstances of my good old friend, Sir John, vex me much. Have you spoken to your cousin about them? She seems wonderfully gay?"

"I have," answered Miss Clifford; "but it would need a heavy weight, Captain Hayward, to sink her light heart. She promised to mention the matter to Mr. Beauchamp, too; but I rather imagine, from what has occurred, that she had not done it."

"Oh, she has done it, depend upon it!" replied the young officer; "and that is what makes her so gay. But I must speak with Beauchamp myself, and make the matter sure."

In the meantime, Beauchamp had walked on with Isabella; and there could be little or no doubt, in the mind of any one who came behind them, that he was making love. Not that Ned Hayward and his fair companion heard a word that was said—no, not a single syllable; but there is a peculiar gesture associated with the making of love, by a gentleman at least, which distinguishes it from every other process. Beauchamp, as we have described him, was about the middle height; but Isabella was not below it; and there was not the slightest occasion for him to bend down his head, in order that she might hear him distinctly, unless he had something to say which he did not wish others to hear likewise. He did bend down his head, however, and said what he had to say, in a very low tone; and, although

he did not stare her rudely in the face; yet from time to time he looked into her eyes as if he thought them the crystal windows of the heart. Isabella, on her side, did not bend her head: she held it a little on one side, indeed, so as in the least perceptible degree to turn the fine small ear to the words that were poured into it; generally, however, she looked down, with the long fringes veiling the violet of her eyes, though from time to time she raised them at something he said; and when her look met his, they fell again. They had to cross over a little brook, and Beauchamp took her hand to help her over. He drew it through his arm when he had done, and there it rested for the remainder of the walk.

Involuntarily, and almost unconsciously as they marked this, Mary Clifford and Captain Hayward turned to each other with a smile. The impulse with each was to see if the other had remarked it—a very simple impulse—but when their looks met, it made a more compound phrase; and the anagram of the heart might read thus:

“May we not as well make love, too?”

It was a sore temptation; but the next instant Ned Hayward’s countenance became exceedingly grave, and the warm healthy glow in his cheek grew a shade paler.

If there was a struggle in his breast, it was brought to an end in about five minutes; for, just as they were climbing the side of the hill again, they were met by joyous old Sir John Slingsby, whose whole face and air generally bore with it an emanation of cheerful content, which is usually supposed, but, alas! mistakenly, to be the peculiar portion of the good and wise. Thoughtlessness, temperament, habit, often possess that which is the coveted possession of wisdom and virtue; and often in this world, the sunshine of the heart spreads over the pathway of him, who neither sees his own misfortunes lying before him, nor thinks of the sorrows of others scattered around.

“Ah, boys and girls, boys and girls!” cried the baronet, laughing, “whither have you wandered so long? I have done a world of business since you have been gone, thank Heaven! and, thank Heaven, have left a world undone! so I shall never, like Alexander, that raudlin, drunken, rattle-pate of antiquity, have to weep for new worlds to conquer. Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward, I have a quarrel with you! Absence from evening drill and morning parade without leave! We will have you tried by a court-martial, boy; but what news have you brought? did you overtake the enemy, or was he too much for you? Whither is he retreated? and last, though not least, who and what is he?”

"On my life, Sir John, I do not know who he is," answered Ned Hayward. "We have had two engagements, in which, I am fain to confess, he has had the advantage, and has retreated in good order both times. I shall catch him yet, however; but at present, I have no time to give full information; for——"

"Not time—not time!" cried the baronet; "what the devil have you done with all your time, not to have half an hour to spare to your old colonel?"

"In the first place, my dear sir, I am wet," replied the young officer, "for I have been in the water, and must change my clothes; but I have won my bet, however—I promised to catch the best trout in the river before noon; and there he is—match him if you can!"

"Before noon," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, taking out his watch; "twenty minutes past twelve, by Jove!"

"Ay, but he has been caught twenty minutes," said Ned Hayward. "I will appeal to all persons present."

"Well, granted, granted," exclaimed the baronet—"the bet's won, the bet's won! You shall change your clothes, make yourself look like a gentleman, and then tell the reverend company your story."

"Impossible," answered Ned Hayward, shaking his head; "I have forty things to do."

"Forty things," cried Sir John; "why, I have finished two hundred and fifty, upon a moderate computation, within an hour and ten minutes."

"Ah, my dear sir," said the young gentleman, "but I have got to change my clothes, write a letter, speak two words to Beauchamp, talk for a quarter of an hour to Ste Gimlet about his boy's education, pack up some clothes, and be down at Tarningham in time for the coach to London, as well as to induce your butler to give me some luncheon, and a glass of the best old sherry in your cellar."

"Pack up some clothes!—coach to London!" cried Sir John Slingsby, in a more serious tone than he had yet used; "the boy is mad—his head his turned! Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward! what the devil do you mean, Ned Hayward?"

"Simply, my dear Sir John, that some business of importance calls me to London immediately," rejoined his young friend; "but I shall be down again to-morrow, or the next day, at the furthest; and, in the meantime, I leave you horse and gun, fishing-tackle and appurtenances, which I give you free leave and licence to confiscate, if I do not keep my word."

"Well, well," exclaimed the baronet, "go along, change

your clothes, and come and get some luncheon. I always thought you a great donkey, Ned, and now I think so more than ever, when I see you quit comfortable quarters for a dull stage-coach. Go along, I say—go along; there's the door, which is always better said on the outside of a house than in the in."

"Thank you, Sir John; but I must speak a word with Beauchamp first," replied Captain Hayward; and, taking his new friend's arm, he drew a little on one side, while the baronet and the two ladies entered the house.

"I have got a favour to ask you, Beauchamp," said Captain Hayward: "matters have got into a complication between myself and this young Wittingham, which may require a pistol-shot to unravel it. The fellow, who fired through the window last night, certainly rode his horse; I walked straight into his room, thinking I might find the man there. I told him the occasion of my coming; he was insolent; and I informed him civilly, what I thought of him; he demanded satisfaction; and I replied, that if there was a gentleman in the county, that could be found to act as his friend, I would do him the honour of meeting him. Business, which one of the two ladies will give you a hint of, if they have not done so already, calls me immediately to London. I have written to tell him so, adding, that I shall be down the day after to-morrow. In the meantime, I shall tell the people at the White Hart, if any one comes from him, to refer them to you. Arrange the affair, therefore, for me, should such be the case; and, remember, the earliest possible time, and the quietest possible manner—I'll bring my pistols—but we must break off, here comes Sir John Slingsby again; not a word to him on any account, there's a good fellow; and now let us talk of something else."

CHAPTER XXII

OVER the mind and over the face of man, however, what cloud, what sunshine, what gleams, what shadows, will not come without any eye but an all-seeing one being able to trace the causes of the change! Thrice in one morning was the whole demeanour of Mr. Beauchamp totally altered. * He descended to breakfast grave and thoughtful; an hour after he was gayer than he had been for years. By the side of Isabella Slingsby he remained cheerful; but before luncheon was over he had plunged again into a fit of deep and gloomy thought, and as soon as Ned Hay-

ward, having taken some food and wine, started up to mount his horse, which was at the door, Beauchamp rose also, saying, "I want one word with you, Hayward, before you go."

"Directly—directly!" answered Ned Hayward. "Good-bye, Sir John—good-bye, Miss Slingsby."

"Mind—day after to-morrow at the latest, Ned," cried the baronet.

"Upon my honour!" replied Hayward. "Farewell Mrs. Clifford; I trust I shall find you here on my return."

"I fear not, Captain Hayward," replied the lady; "but you have promised, you know, to come over and——"

"Nay, dear mamma, I think you will be here," said Mary Clifford; "I think for once I shall attempt to coax you."

Mrs. Clifford seemed somewhat surprised at her daughter's eagerness to stay; but Sir John exclaimed, joyously, "There's a good girl—there's a capital girl, Mary; you are the best little girl in the world. She'll stay—she'll stay! We'll get up a conspiracy against her. There, be off, Ned. No long leave-takings. You'll find us all here when you come back, just as you left us: me, as solemn and severe as usual, my sister as gay and jovial, Isabella as pensorous, and Mary as merry and as madcap ever."

Ned Hayward, however, did not fail to bid Miss Clifford adieu before he went, and, be it remarked, he did it in a somewhat lower tone than usual, and added a few more words than he had spoken to the rest. Beauchamp accompanied him to the door, and then pausing near the house, inquired in a low tone, "Are you quite certain the man with whom you had the struggle this morning is the same who fired the shot last night?"

"Perfectly," answered Ned Hayward, "for I saw his face quite well in the sand-pit; and I never forget a face. I wish to heaven we could catch him!"

"Have you any idea of his name?" asked Beauchamp.

"None in the world," replied Ned Hayward; "but there are two people here who must know, I think. One is young Wittingham, and the other is Ste Gimlet, otherwise Wolf. I have a strong notion this fellow was one of those attacking the carriage the other night. But that puts me in mind, Beauchamp, that I intended to go up and talk to Gimlet, but I have not time now. I wish you would; and just tell him from me, I will pay his boy's schooling if he will send him to learn something better than making bird-traps. You can perhaps find out at the

same time who this fellow is, so it may be worth a walk."

"I will, I will!" answered Beauchamp; "but you said the young ladies here had something to tell me. What is it?"

"I thought they had done it," replied Ned Hayward; "that is stupid! But I have not time now; you must ask them; good-bye," and touching his horse lightly with his heel, he was soon on his way to Tarningham.

Beauchamp paused for a moment on the steps in deep meditation, and then turned into the house, saying to himself, "This must be inquired into instantly." He found Sir John Slingsby in the luncheon-room, reading the newspaper, but nobody else, for the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, and two of them, at least, were looking somewhat anxiously for his coming. It very rarely happens that any one who is looked anxiously for ever does come; and, of course, in the present instance, Beauchamp took the natural course, and disappointed the two ladies.

"I have a message to deliver from Captain Hayward to your new keeper, Sir John," he said; "and therefore I will walk over to his cottage, and see him. An hour, I dare say, will accomplish it."

"It depends upon legs, my dear sir," answered the baronet, looking up. "It would cost my two an hour and a half to go and come; so if I might advise, you would take four. You will find plenty of hoofs in the stables, and a groom to show you the way. Thus you will be back the sooner, and the women will have something to talk to; for I must be busy—very busy—devilish busy, indeed! I have not done any business for ten years, the lawyer tells me, so I must work hard to-day. I'll read the papers first, however, if Wharton himself stood at the door: and he is a great deal worse than Satan. I like to hear all the lies that are going about in the world, and as newspapers were certainly invented for the propagation of falsehood, one is sure to find all there. Take a horse—take a horse, Beauchamp! Life is too short to walk three miles and back to speak with a gamkeeper."

"Well, Sir John, I will, with many thanks," answered his guest; and in about a quarter of an hour he was trotting away towards the new cottage of Stephen Gimlet, with groom to show him the way. That way was a very picturesque one, cutting off an angle of the moor, and then winding through wild lanes, rich with all sorts of flowers and shrubs, till at length a small old gray church appeared in view at the side of a little green. The stone,

where the thick ivy hid it not, was incrustated in many places with yellow, white, and brown lichens, giving that peculiar rich hue with which nature is so fond of investing old buildings. There was but one other edifice of any kind in the neighbourhood, and that was a small cottage of two stories, built close against the side of the church. Probably it had originally been the abode of the sexton, and the ivy stretching forth from the neighbouring buttress had caught and twined round the chimneys, meeting several lower shoots of the same creeping plant, and enveloped one whole moiety in a green mantle. The sunshine was streaming from behind the church, between it and the cottage, and that ray made the whole scene look cheerful enough; but yet Beauchamp could not help thinking, "This place, with its solitary house and lonely church, its little green, and the small fields behind with their close hedge-rows, must look somewhat desolate in dull weather. Still the house seems a comfortable one, and there has been care bestowed upon the garden, with its flowers and herbs. I hope this is Gimlet's cottage; for the very fact of finding such things in preparation may waken in him different tastes from those to which he has been habituated."

"Here's the place, sir," said the groom, riding up and touching his hat, and at the same moment the sound of the horses' feet brought the rosy, curly-headed urchin of the ci-devant poacher trotting to the door.

Beauchamp dismounted and went in; and instantly a loud, yelping bark was heard from the other side of the front room, where a terrier dog was tied to the post of a sort of dresser. By the side of the dog was the figure of the newly-constructed gamekeeper himself stooping down and arranging sundry boxes and cages on the ground.

As soon as he heard Beauchamp's step, Ste Gimlet raised himself, and, recognising his visitor, at once a well-pleased smile spread over his face, which the gentleman thought gave great promise for the future. It is something, as this world goes, to be glad to see one from whom we have received a benefit. The opposite emotion is more general, unless we expect new favours; a fact of which Beauchamp had been made aware by some sad experience, and as the man's pleased look was instantaneous, without a touch of affectation in it, he augured well for some of the feelings of his heart.

"Well, Gimlet!" said the visitor; "I am happy to see that some of your stock has been saved, even if all your furniture has perished."

"Thank you sir," replied the other—"my furniture was not worth a groat. I made most of it myself; but I lost a good many things it won't be easy to get again. All the dogs that were in the house but this one were burned or choked. He broke his cord and got away. All my ferrets too went, but three that were in the shed; and the tame badger, poor fellow, I found a bit of his skin this morning. I thank you very much, sir, for what you gave me, and if you wait five minutes you'll see what I've done with it. I think it will give you pleasure, sir; for I've contrived to get quite enough to set the place out comfortably, and have something over in case anything is forgotten."

Beauchamp liked the man's way of expressing his gratitude by showing that he appreciated the feelings in which the benefit was conferred. It was worth a thousand hyperboles.

"I shall stay some little time, Gimlet," he said; "for I have one or two things to talk to you about, if you can spare a minute."

"Certainly, sir," answered the man, in a respectful tone; "but I can't ask you to sit down, because you see there is no chair."

"Never mind that," replied Beauchamp; "but what I wished principally to say is this: my friend, Captain Hayward, takes a good deal of interest in you and in your boy; and, as he was going to London to-day, he asked me to see you, and tell you, that if you like to let the poor little fellow attend any good school in the neighbourhood, he will pay the expenses. He wished me to point out to you what an advantage it will be to him to have a good education, and also how much better and more safe it is for him to be at school, while you are absent on your duty, than shut up alone in your house."

"Whatever that gentleman wishes, sir, I will do," Gimlet replied. "I never knew one like him before—I wish I had—but, however, I am bound to do what he tells me; and even if I did not see and know that what he says in this matter is good and right, I would do it all the same. But as for paying, sir, I hope he won't ask me to let him do that, for I have now got quite enough and to spare; and although I feel it a pleasure to be grateful to such a gentleman, yet he can do good elsewhere with the money."

"You can settle that with him afterwards, Gimlet," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "for he is coming back in a day or two; but I now want to ask you a question which you must answer or not, as you think fit. You were with Captain Hayward, it seems, when he came up with the

man who fired into the window of the hall, and you saw his face, I think?"

Gimlet nodded his head, saying, "I did, sir."

"Do you know the man?" asked Beauchamp, fixing his eyes upon him.

"Yes, sir," replied the other at once, with the colour coming up into his face; "but before you go on, just let me say a word. That person and I were in some sort companions together once, in a matter we had better have let alone, and I should not like to 'peach.'"

"In regard to the attack upon the carriage—to which I know you allude—I am not about to inquire," replied Beauchamp; "but I will ask you only one other question, and I promise you, upon my honour, not to use anything you tell me against the person. Was his name Moreton?"

"I won't tell you a lie, sir," answered Gimlet. "It was, though how you have found it out I can't guess, for he has been away from this part of the country for many a year."

"It matters not," answered Beauchamp, "how I found it out. I know he has been absent many a year. Can you tell me how long he has returned?"

"That I can't say, I'm sure, sir," replied the man; "but I did hear that he and his lady have been lodging at Buxton's inn for a day or two, but not more. It's a great pity to see how he has gone on, and to sell that fine old place that has been theirs for so many hundred years! I should think, that if one had anything worth having which had been one's father's, one's grandfather's, and one's great grandfather's, for such a long while, it would keep one straight. It's mostly when a man has nothing to pride himself upon that he goes wrong."

"Not always," answered Beauchamp; "unbridled passion, my good friend, youth, inexperience, sometimes accident, lead a man to commit a false step, and that is very difficult to retrieve, in this life."

"Ay, ay, I know that, I know that, sir," answered Gimlet, "but I hope not impossible;" and he looked up in Beauchamp's face with an expression of doubt and inquiry.

"By no means impossible," replied the gentleman, "and the man who has the courage and strength of mind to retrieve a false step, gives a better assurance to society for his future conduct than perhaps a man who has never committed one can do."

Gimlet looked down, and meditated for a minute or two, and, though he did not distinctly express the subject of his contemplation, his reverie ended with the words, "Well, I will try." The next moment he added, "I don't

think, however, that this Captain Moreton will ever make much of it; for he has been going on now a long while in the same way, from a boy to a lad, and from a lad to a man. He broke his father's heart, they say, after having ruined him to pay his debts; but the worst of it all is, he was always trying to make others as bad as himself. He did me no good; for when I was a boy, and used to go out and carry his game-bag, he put me up to all manner of things, and that was the beginning of my liking to what people call poaching. Then, too, he had a great hand in ruining this young Harry Wittingham. He taught him to gamble and drink, and a great deal more, when he was a mere child, I may say."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Beauchamp; "then the young man is to be pitied more than blamed."

"I don't know, sir—I don't know," answered the gamekeeper; "he's a bad-hearted fellow. He set fire to my cottage, that's clear enough, and he knew the boy was in it, too; but this business of firing in at the window I can't make out at all. I should have thought it had been an accident, if he had not afterwards taken a shot at Captain Hayward."

"I wish to heaven I could think it was an accident," answered Beauchamp; "but that is out of the question. They say there are thoughts of pulling down the old house, if the place is not sold again very soon. How far is it?"

"Oh, not three-quarters of a mile from this," replied the gamekeeper. "Have you never seen it, sir? It is a fine old place."

"Yes, I have seen it in former years," said Beauchamp. "Is it in this parish, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir, this is the parish church close by. They all lie buried in a vault here, and their monuments are in the aisle; would you like to see them? The key is always left in this cottage. There they lie, more than twenty of them—the Moretons, I mean—for you know the man's father was not a Moreton; he was a brother of the Lord Viscount Lenham; but, when he married the heiress he took the name of Moreton, according to her father's will. His tomb is in there, and I think it runs, 'The Honourable Henry John St. Leger Moreton.' It is a plain enough tomb for such a fine gentleman as he was; but those of the Moretons are very handsome, with great figures cut in stone as big as life."

"I should like to see them," said Beauchamp, rousing himself from a reverie.

"That's easily done," answered the gamekeeper; "there's a key always here;" and taking one down from a nail driven in the wall, he led the way to a small side door of the church.

Walking on into the building, Beauchamp and his companion passed along, from monument to monument, pausing to read the different inscriptions, the greater part of which were more intelligible to Beauchamp than his companion, as many were written in Latin. At length, they came to a small and very plain tablet of modern erection, which bore the name of the last possessor of the Moreton property; and Beauchamp paused and gazed at it long, with a very sad and gloomy air.

There is always something melancholy in contemplating the final resting-place of the last of a long line. The mind naturally sums up the hopes gone by, the cherished expectations frustrated, the grandeur and the brightness passed away. The picture of many generations in infancy, manhood, decrepitude, with a long train of sports and joys, and pangs and sufferings, rises like a moving pageant to the eye of imagination; and the heart draws its own homily from the fate and history of others. But there seemed something more than this in the young gentleman's breast. His countenance was stern, as well as sad; it expressed a bitter gloom, rather than melancholy; and, folding his arms upon his chest, with a knitted brow, and teeth hard set together, he gazed upon the tablet in deep silence, till the sound of a step behind him startled him; and, turning round, he beheld good Doctor Miles slowly pacing up the aisle towards him.

Stephen Gimlet bowed low to the rector, and drew back; but Beauchamp did not change his place, though he welcomed his reverend friend with a smile.

"I want to speak with you, Stephen," said Doctor Miles, as he approached; and then turning towards Beauchamp, he added, "How are you, my dear sir? There are some fine monuments here."

Beauchamp laid his hand upon the clergyman's arm, and pointing to the tablet before him, murmured, in a low voice, "I have something to say to you about that, my good friend; I will walk back with you; for I have long intended to talk to you on several subjects which had better not be delayed any longer; I will leave you to speak with this good man here, if you will join me before the cottage."

"Oh, you need not go—you need not go," said Doctor Miles, "I have nothing to say you may not hear. I wanted to tell you, Stephen," he continued, turning to the ci-de-

vant poacher, "that I have been down to-day to Tarningham, and have seen old Mrs. Lamb and her son William."

"He's a dear good boy, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, gazing in the rector's face, "and he was kind to me, and used to come up and see his poor sister Mary when nobody else would come near her. The poor little fellow, all crooked and deformed as he is, has more heart and soul in him than the whole town of Tarningham."

"There are more good people in Tarningham, and in the world, Stephen, than you know," answered Dr. Miles, with a sharp look; "you have to learn, my good friend, that there are natural consequences attached to every particular line of conduct; and, as you turn a key in a door, one way to open it, and another way to shut it, so, if your conduct be good, you open men's hearts towards you; if your conduct be bad, you close them."

Stephen Gimlet rubbed his finger on his temple, and answered in a somewhat bitter, but by no means insolent tone: "It's a very hard lock, sir, that of men's hearts; and when once it's shut, the bolt gets mighty rusty—at least, so I've found it."

"Stephen! Stephen!" exclaimed the worthy clergyman, raising his finger with a monitory and reproachful gesture, "can you say so—especially to-day?"

"No, sir; no, sir," cried Stephen Gimlet, eagerly; "I am wrong—I am very wrong; but just then there came across me the recollection of all the hard usage I have had for twelve long years, and how it had driven me from bad to worse—ay! and killed my poor Mary, too; for her father was very hard; and though he said her marrying me broke his heart, I am sure he broke hers."

"You must not brood upon such things, Gimlet," said Dr. Miles. "It is better, wiser, and more Christian, for every man to think of the share which his own faults have had in shaping his own fate; and, if he do so coolly and dispassionately, he will find much less blame to be attributed to others than he is inclined to believe. But do not let us waste time upon such considerations. I went down to talk to Mrs. Lamb about you and your boy; I told her what Sir John had done for you; and the imminent peril of death which the poor child had fallen into, from being left totally alone, when you are absent. The good old woman—and pray remark, Stephen, I don't call people good, as the world generally does, without thinking them so—was very much affected, and wept a good deal, and in the end she said she was quite ready to come up and keep

house for you, and take care of the child while you are away."

The man seemed troubled; for the offer was one which, in many respects, was pleasant and convenient to him; but there was a bitter remnant of resentment at the opposition which his unfortunate wife's parents had shown to her marriage with himself, and at the obstinacy with which her father had refused all reconciliation, which struggled against better feelings, and checked any reply upon his lips. Dr. Miles, however, was an experienced examiner of the human heart: and, when he saw such ulcerations, he generally knew the remedy, and how to apply it. In this instance, he put all his evil spirits to flight in a moment by awakening a better one, in whose presence they could not stand.

"The only difficulty with poor Mrs. Lamb seemed to be," he said, after watching the man's countenance during a momentary pause, "that she is so poor. She said that you would have enough to do with your money, and that the little she has, which does not amount to four shillings a week, would not pay her part of your housekeeping."

"Oh, if that's all, doctor," cried Stephen Gimlet, "don't let that stand in the way. My poor Mary's mother shall never want a meal while I can work for it. I'd find her one any how, if I had to go without myself. Besides, you know, I am rich now, and I'll take care to keep all straight, so as not to get poor again. There could not be a greater pleasure to me, I can assure you, sir, than to share whatever I've got with poor Mary's mother, and that dear good boy Bill. Thanks to this kind gentleman, I've got a nice little lot of furniture; and, if the old woman will but bring her bed, we shall do very well, I'll warrant; and the boy will be taken care of, and go to the school; and we'll all lead a different sort of life, and be quite happy, I dare say. No, not quite happy! I can never be quite happy any more, since my poor girl left me: but she is happy, I am sure; and that's one comfort."

"The greatest," said Dr. Miles, whose spirit of philanthropy in a peculiar way was very easily roused; "the greatest, Stephen; and as it is by no means impossible, nor, I will say, improbable, both from the light of natural reason and many passages of Scripture, that the spirits of the dead are permitted to see the conduct and actions of those they loved on earth, after the long separation has occurred, think what a satisfaction it will be to your poor wife, if she can behold you acting as a son to her mother, —mind, I don't say that such a thing is by any means cer-

tain ; I only hint that it is not impossible, nor altogether improbable, that such a power may exist in disembodied spirits."

"I am quite sure it does," said Stephen Gimlet, with calm earnestness ; "I have seen her many a time sitting by the side of the water under the willow trees, and watching me when I was putting in my night-lines."

"I think you are mistaken, Stephen," said Dr. Miles, shaking his head ; "but, at all events, if such a thing be possible, she will now watch you with more satisfaction, when you are supplying her place in affection to her mother."

"I will do my best, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, "if it be only on that account."

"I am sure you will, Stephen," answered the worthy clergyman ; "and so, the first spare moment you have, you had better go down and talk with Mrs. Lamb. Now, Mr. Beauchamp, I am ready."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WELL, well! sit down and cheer yourself, Goody Lamb," said Stephen Gimlet, after an interval of thirty hours—for I must pass over for the present those other events affecting more important characters in this tale, which filled up the intervening time in the neighbourhood of Tarningham—"let bygones be bygones, as they say in the country where you have lived so much. Here you are, in as comfortable a cottage as any in the country. I have plenty, and to spare ; and, forgetting all that's past and done, I will try to be a son to you and a brother to poor Bill."

"Thank you, Stephen, thank you," said the old woman to whom he spoke—a quiet, resigned-looking person, with fine features, and large dark eyes, undimmed by time, though the hair was as white as snow, the skin exceedingly wrinkled, and the frame, apparently, enfeebled and bowed down with sickness, cares, or years—"I am sure you will do what you can, my poor lad ; but still I cannot help feeling a little odd at having to move, again at my time of life. I thought, when I and my poor husband, Davie Lamb, came up here to Tarningham, out of Scotland, it was the last time I should have to change. But we can never tell what may happen to us. I fancied, when I went to Scotland with stiff old Miss Moreton, that I was to be settled there for life. There I married Lamb, and thought it less likely than ever that I should change, when, suddenly, he takes it into his head to come up here, to the

place where I was born and brought up, and did not choose at the time to tell me why or wherefore."

"Ay, he was a close, hard man," said Stephen Gimlet; "he was not likely to give reasons to any one; he never did to me, but just said two or three words, and flung away."

"He was a kind husband and a kind father," said the widow, "though he said less than most men, I will acknowledge."

"He was not kind to his poor dear girl," muttered Stephen Gimlet, in a tone which rendered his words scarcely audible; but yet the widow caught, or divined, their sense clearly enough; and she answered,—

"Well, Stephen, don't let us talk about it. There are some things that you and I cannot well agree upon; and it is better not to speak of them. Poor Davie's temper was soured by a great many things. People did not behave as well as they ought; and, although I found out afterwards that they persuaded him to come here, they did not do for him what they promised."

"That's likely," answered the ci-devant poacher, "though I have no occasion to say so, either, for people have done much more for me than they ever promised, and more than I ever expected. See what good Sir John Slingsby has done, after I have been taking his game for this many a year; and Mr. Beauchamp, too—why, it was a twenty-pound note he gave me, just because he heard that my cottage had been burnt down, and all the things in it destroyed. But it was all owing to Captain Hayward, who began it by saving the dear boy's life, that lies sleeping in t'other room, and spoke well of me—which nobody ever took the trouble to do before—and said I was not so bad as I seemed; and, please God, I'll not give his promise the lie, anyhow."

"God bless him for a good man!" said Widow Lamb; "he is one of the few, Stephen, whose heart and soul are in doing good."

"Ay, that he is," answered the gamekeeper; "but I did not know you knew him, goody."

"No, I do not know much of him," answered the old lady, "but I know he has been very kind to my boy Bill; and before he went off for London, t'other day, had a long talk to him, which is better, to my thinking, than the money he gave him. But who is this Mr. Beauchamp you say is such a kind man, too? I've heard Bill talk of him, and he tells me the same; but I can't well make out about him."

"Why, he is a friend of Captain Hayward's," rejoined the gamekeeper; "he has been staying a long while at the White Hart, and just the same sort of man as the other, though a sadder-looking man, and not so frank and free."

"But what looking man is he?" asked the old woman. "You can tell what a dog's like, or what a ferret's like, Stephen, well enough; and I should like to hear about him—for I have a curiosity, somehow."

"Why, he is a tall man, and a strong man," answered Stephen Gimlet, "with a good deal of darkish hair, not what one would say curling, but yet not straight, either; and large eyes, in which you can see little or no white; very bright and sparkling, too. Then he's somewhat pale and sunburnt, and very plain in his dress, always in dark clothes; but yet, when one looks at him, one would not like to say a saucy thing to him; for there is something, I don't know what, in his way and his look, that, though he is as kind as possible when he speaks, seems to tell everybody, 'I am not an ordinary kind of person.' He never wears any gloves that I saw; but, for all that, his hands are as clean as if they had been washed the minute before, and the wristbands of his shirt are as white as snow."

Goody Lamb paused, thoughtfully, and rubbed her forehead once or twice under the gray hair.

"I have seen him, then," she said at length, in a very peculiar tone; "he has passed my little window more than once. And his name is Beauchamp, is it?"

"So they say," answered Stephen Gimlet, in some surprise; "why should it not be?"

"Oh! I don't know," answered the widow, and there she ceased.

"Well, you are very droll to-night, goody," said Stephen Gimlet; "but I should like a cup of tea before I go out upon my rounds—so I'll just get some sticks to make the fire burn, for that kettle does nothing but simmer."

Thus saying he went into the little passage, and out into a small yard, whence he brought a faggot or two. He then laid them on the hot embers, blew up a flame, and made the kettle boil; and, all this time, not a word passed between him and Goody Lamb; for both seemed very busy with thoughts of their own. At length, when a teapot and some cups had been produced, and a small packet of tea, wrapped up in a brown paper, the old lady sat down to prepare the beverage for her son-in-law as the first act of kindly service she rendered him since she had under-

taken to keep his house. To say the truth, it was more for herself than for him that the tea was made; for Stephen Gimlet did not like the infusion, and was not accustomed to it; but he knew the good dame's tastes, and was anxious to make her as comfortable as he could.

While she was making the tea after her own peculiar fashion—and almost every one has a mode of his own—Gimlet stood on the other side of the little deal table, and watched her proceedings. At length he said, somewhat suddenly, "Yes, Mr. Beauchamp was up here yesterday, just when Doctor Miles was talking to me, and he asked me a great many questions about——" and here he paused, thinking he might be violating some confidence if he mentioned the subject of his visitor's inquiries. The next instant he concluded his sentence in a different way from that which he first intended, saying—"about a good many things; and then he went into the church with me, and looked at all the tombs of the Moretous, and especially that of the last gentleman."

"Ay, well he might," answered Goody Lamb.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stephen Gimlet, with a slight laugh; "then you seem to know more of him than I do."

Goody Lamb nodded her head; and her son-in-law proceeded with some warmth: "Then I am sure you know no harm of him!"

"No, Stephen—no!" she said, "I do not! I saw him as a young lad, and I have not seen him since. But I have not forgotten him; for he came down to my house—what is called the Grieve's House in Scotland—on the morning of a day that turned out the heaviest day of his life; and he was a gay young lad then; and he saw my poor boy, who was then a little fellow of four years old, that all the folks there used to gibe at on account of his misfortunes; but this gentleman took him on his knee, and patted his head, and was kind to him, and said he was a clever boy, and gave him a couple of shillings to buy himself a little flute, because the poor fellow was fond of music even then, and used to whistle so sweetly, it was enough to break one's heart to hear such sounds come from such a poor body. The gentleman has never thought of me or mine since then, I'll warrant, but I have thought of him often enough—and I'll ask him a question or two some day, please God!"

"The heaviest day in his life!" repeated Stephen Gimlet, who had marked every word she uttered with strong attention; "how was that, Goody?"

"Ay," answered Widow Lamb, shaking her head, "as

they say in that country, it is no good talking of all that ; so ask me no more questions, Stephen, but sit down and take your tea, my man, and then go about your work."

Stephen Gimlet sat down, and, with not the greatest pleasure in the world, took a cup of the beverage she had prepared ; but still he was very thoughtful, for there was something in Mr. Beauchamp, even in the grave sadness of his ordinary manner, which created a kind of interest in a man of a peculiarly imaginative character ; and he would have given a good deal to know all that Widow Lamb could tell but would not. He did not choose to question her, however ; and, after having finished a large slice of brown bread, he rose and unfastened the only dog he had remaining, in order to go out upon his night's round.

Just at that moment some one tried the latch of the cottage, and then knocked for admission ; and the dog, springing forward, growled, barked, and snarled furiously.

The gamekeeper chid him back, and then opened the door, when, to his surprise, he saw the figure of young Harry Wittingham before him. The dog sprang forward again, as if he would have torn the visitor to pieces ; and, to say the truth, Stephen Gimlet felt a great inclination to let the beast have his way ; but, after a moment's thought, he drove it back again, saying, with a bitter laugh,—

"The beast knows the danger of letting you in. What do you want with me, sir ?"

"I want you to do me a great service, Ste," said Harry Wittingham, with a familiar and friendly air ; "and I am sure you will, if——"

"No I won't," answered Stephen Gimlet ; "if it were to save you from hanging I would not put my foot over that door-step. It is no use talking, Mr. Wittingham ; I will have nothing more to do with any of your tricks. I don't wish ever to see you again ; I'm in a new way of life, and it won't do, I can tell you."

"Oh, I have heard all about that," answered the young man, in a light tone ; "and, moreover, that you have taken a silly fancy into your head, that I set fire to your cottage. It is all nonsense, upon my word. Your boy must have done it, playing with the fire that was on the hearth."

Stephen Gimlet's face turned somewhat pale with the effort to keep down the anger that was in his heart ; but he replied shortly and quickly, for fear it should burst forth.

"The boy had no fire to play with—you knew well he was locked up in the bed-room, and there he was found when you burned the place down."

"Well, if I had any hand in it," said young Wittingham, "it must have been a mere accident."

"Ay, when you knew there was a poor helpless child in the house," said Stephen Gimlet, bitterly; "it was a sort of accident that well-nigh deserved hanging."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my good fellow!" said the young man; "you are angry about nothing; and though you have got a good place I dare say you are not the man to refuse a couple of guineas when they are offered to you."

"If you offer them," cried Stephen Gimlet, furiously, "I'll throw them in your face! An accident, indeed! to burn my cottage, and nearly my poor child! I suppose it was by accident that you stopped the carriage in the lane? And by accident that you set a man to fire at your own father through the window?"

"Hush, hush, Stephen," cried Widow Lamb, catching hold of his coat, and attempting to keep him back, as he took a step towards Harry Wittingham, who turned very pale.

The young man recovered his audacity the next moment, however, and exclaimed,—

"Pooh! let him alone, good woman; if he thinks to bully me, he is mi-taken."

"Get out of this house," cried Stephen Gimlet, advancing close to him. "Get out of this house, without another word, or I'll break your neck!"

"You are a fool," answered young Wittingham; "and, if you don't mind, I'll send you to Botany Bay."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when Stephen Gimlet aimed a straight blow at him with his right hand, which was immediately parried; for the young vagabond was not unskilful in the science of defence; but the next instant, the gamekeeper's left told with stunning effect in the midst of his face, and he fell prostrate, with his head out of the doorway and his feet within. Stephen Gimlet looked at him for a moment, then, stooping down, lifted him in his strong arms, pitched him headlong out, and shut the door.

"There!" said Gimlet;—"now I'll sit down for a minute and get cool."

CHAPTER XXIV

WE will go back, if it pleases the reader ; for fortunately, it happens that, in a work of this character, one can go back. Oh, how often in human life is it to be wished that we could do the same ! What deeds, done amiss, would then be rectified ! What mistakes in thought, in conduct, in language, would then be corrected ! What evils for the future avoided ! What false steps would be turned back ! What moral bonds, shackling our whole being, would not then be broken ! I do believe that, if any man would take any hour out of any period of his life, and look at it with a calm, impartial, unprejudiced eye, he would feel a longing to turn back and change something therein : he would wish to say more than he had said—or less—to say it in a different tone—with a different look—or he would have acted differently—he would have yielded—or resisted—or listened—or refused to listen—he would wish to have exerted himself energetically—or to have remained passive—or to have meditated ere he acted—or considered something he had forgotten—or attended to the small, still voice in his heart, when he had shut his ears. Something, something, he ever would have altered in the past ! But, alas ! the past is the only reality of life, unchangeable, irretrievable, indestructible ; we can neither mould it, nor recall it, nor wipe it out. There it stands for ever : the rock of adamant, up whose steep side we can hew no backward path.

We will turn to where we left Doctor Miles and Beauchamp. Issuing forth from the church, and passing round Stephen Gimlet's cottage, they found the worthy clergyman's little phaeton standing by the two horses which Beauchamp had brought from Tarningham Park.

Orders were given for the four-wheeled and four-footed things to follow slowly ; and the two gentlemen walked forward on foot, the younger putting his hand lightly through the arm of the elder, as a man does when he wishes to bespeak attention to what he is going to say.

"I have been looking at those monuments with some interest, my dear doctor," said Beauchamp, after they had taken about twenty steps in advance ; "and now I am going to make you, in some degree, what, I dare say, as a good Protestant divine, you never expected to become—my father-confessor. There are several things upon which I much wish to consult you, as I have great need of a good and fair opinion and advice."

"The best that it is in my power to give, you shall have, my young friend," answered Dr. Miles; "not that I expect you to take my advice, either; for I never yet, in the course of a long life, knew above two men who did take advice when it was given. But that is not always the fault of the giver; and therefore, mine is ever ready, when it is asked. What is it you have to say?"

"More, I fear, than can be well said in one conversation," answered Beauchamp; "but I had better begin and tell a part, premising, that it is under the seal of confession, and therefore——"

"Shall be as much your own secret, as if it had not been given to me," said Doctor Miles. "Go on."

"Well, then, for one part of the story," said Beauchamp, with a smile at his old companion's abruptness; "in the first place, my dear doctor, I am, in some sort, an impostor; and our mutual friend, Stanhope, has aided the cheat."

Doctor Miles turned round sharply, and looked in his face for a moment; then nodded his head, as he saw there was no appearance of shame in the expression, and gazed straightforward again, without saying a word.

"To make the matter short, my good friend," continued his companion, "my name is not Beauchamp at all, nor anything the least like it."

"Nom de guerre," said Doctor Miles; "pray, what may the war be about?"

"Of that hereafter," said Beauchamp — for I shall still continue to call him by the name which he repudiated. "You have seen that I have been somewhat anxious to purchase this Moreton Hall property, and I am still anxious to do so, though I have received a little bit of news on that subject to-day, which may make me very cautious about the examination of titles, &c. This intelligence is, that the ostensible proprietor is not the real one; your acquaintance, Mr. Wharton, having become virtually possessed of the property, perhaps by not the fairest means."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles; but he added nothing further, and Beauchamp went on.

"Poor Mr. St. Leger Moreton," he said, "was by no means a man of business,—an easy, kind-hearted, somewhat too sensitive person."

"I know, I know!" answered Doctor Miles; "I was well acquainted with him; and if ever man died of a broken heart, which is by no means so unusual an occurrence as people suppose, he did so."

"I believe it," answered Beauchamp; "but at all events,

he was not a man, as you must know, to ascertain that he was dealt fairly by. His son, I am sorry to say, was willing to do anything for ready money—I say anything, for I do not know that act to which he would not have recourse for any object that he sought to gain.”

“You seem to know them all thoroughly,” said Doctor Miles, drily; and he then added, in a warmer tone, “I will tell you what, my dear sir, this Captain Moreton is one of those men who make us ashamed of human nature. Born to a fine estate, the son of an excellent woman and amiable man, though a weak one, he went on corrupting himself and every one else, from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. He is the only man I have ever known without one principle of any kind, or one redeeming point. There is but one thing to be said in his excuse—namely, that his great aunt, old Miss Moreton, who went to Scotland, and left him a small property there of about a thousand a year, which he dissipated totally in eleven weeks after he got it, spoiled him from his infancy—pampered, indulged, encouraged him in the most frightful manner. Even his vices became virtues in her eyes: so that there is not much marvel that he became a gambler, a débauchée, a duellist, and a scoundrel. People may consider that his courage and his talents were redeeming qualities, but I look upon them as none. They were only energies, which carried him on to deeper wickedness and infamy. He is now, I believe, a common sharper and swindler.”

“I have let you go on, doctor,” said Beauchamp, “because you have not said one word that is just; but yet I must tell you, that this gentleman is my first-cousin, and, unfortunately, heir to my estates and name.”

Doctor Miles halted suddenly, and looked at his companion with some surprise.

“This takes me unprepared,” he said; “I never heard of his having more than one cousin—namely, the present Lord Lenham; and he, I understood, was travelling in India, for pleasure—a curious place to go for pleasure—but all men have their whims.”

“It was not exactly a whim that led me thither, my dear doctor,” said Beauchamp; “from the time I was twenty-one years of age up to the present hour, I have been a wanderer over the face of the earth, expiating in bitterness of heart one early error. I have not time now, and, I may say also, I have not spirits at the present moment to enter into the long detail of my past history. Let it suffice for the present to say, that a species of per-

secution, very difficult to avoid or bear, made me for many years a stranger to my native country. I visited every part of Europe and America, and then thought I would travel in the East, visiting scenes full of interest both from their novelty, in some respects, and from the vast antiquity to which their history and many of their monuments go back. As I found that all my movements were watched for the purpose of subjecting me to annoyance, I thought my residence in India a favourable opportunity for dropping my title and assuming another name, and have ever since gone by that of Beauchamp. During these wanderings my income has far exceeded my expenditure; a large sum of money has accumulated, and, on my return to England, I was advised to invest it in land. My attention was first directed to this estate, which I am desirous of purchasing, by finding a letter at my agents' from my cousin, Captain Moreton, expressing great penitence for all that had passed, professing a desire to retrieve his errors, lamenting the loss of the family property, and asking for a loan of five thousand pounds.

"I hope you did not give it him," cried Dr. Miles. "His penitence is all feigned; his reformation false; the money would go at the gambling table in a week. I am not uncharitable in saying so, for I have had the opportunity of ascertaining, within this month, that the man is the same as ever."

"So I found, on making inquiries," rejoined Beauchamp, "and, consequently, I refused decidedly. This refusal brought a most insolent and abusive letter, of which I took no notice; but, having received intimation that the man is married, I made up my mind to the following course: to purchase this property, and if he have any children, to make it the condition of my giving him pecuniary assistance, that he shall give up one of them to be educated entirely by myself. Having ensured that all shall be done to make that child a worthy member of society, I would settle the Moreton estate upon it; and thus, at all events, leave one of my name in a situation to do honour to it."

"A kind plan, and a good one," said Dr. Miles; "but yet people will call it a whimsical one, and wonder that you do not marry, and transmit your property and name to children of your own."

A bright and cheerful smile came upon Beauchamp's face.

"Hitherto, my dear doctor," he said, "that has been impossible. The obstacles, however, are now removed—at least, I believe so; and perhaps some day I may follow

the course you suggest; but that will make no difference in regard to my intention. If I have children of my own, they will have more than enough for happiness, and having conceived a scheme of this kind, I never like to abandon it. I will, therefore, purchase this property, if it can be ascertained that Mr. Wharton's title is perfectly clear; but, perhaps you, as the clergyman of two parishes here, can obtain proofs for me, that all the collateral heirs to the estate, under the entail made by Sir Charles Moreton, are extinct beyond all doubt. Under those circumstances, the sale by my uncle and his son would be valid."

"Wharton would not have bought it unless he was sure," said Doctor Miles.

"The sum actually paid was very small," replied Beauchamp, in a peculiar tone—"all the rest went to cover a debt, real or pretended, of Mr. Wharton's own. But here we are at the gates of the park, and so I must bring our conference to an end. To-morrow, or the next day, I will tell you more of my personal history, for there are other subjects on which I must consult you. Do you know who this is riding up so fast?"

"A fool," said Dr. Miles; and almost as he spoke, a young, fresh-coloured man, dressed in a green coat, and leather breeches, and mounted on a splendid horse, with a servant behind him, cantered up, and sprang to the ground.

"I don't know—ah—whether I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp—ah?" he said, in a self-sufficient tone.

Beauchamp bowed his head, saying, "The same, sir."

"Then, sir—ah—my name is Granty—ah—and you see—ah—I have been referred to you—ah—as the friend of a certain Captain Hayward—ah—in reference to a little affair—ah—between him and my friend Harry Wittingham—ah—whom he threatened to horsewhip—ah."

"If he threatened," answered Beauchamp, in a calm tone, "he is a very likely man to fulfil his word—but I think, sir, we had better speak upon this subject alone, as Captain Hayward has put me in possession of his views. This is my friend, Dr. Miles—a clergyman."

"Oh, yes, I know Doctor Miles—ah," said Mr. Granty; "a very good fellow, aren't you, Miles—ah?"

"No, sir, I am not," answered Dr. Miles; "but now, Mr. Beauchamp, I will leave you, as you seem to have some pleasant conversation before you;" and shaking Mr. Beauchamp by the hand, without any further apparent notice of what he had heard, Doctor Miles walked to the

side of his carriage and got in, honouring Mr. Granty with the sort of cold, stiff bow, that a poker might be supposed to make, if it were taught to dance a minuet. But Doctor Miles had noticed all that had passed, and did not forget it.

And now, dear reader, we will put our horses into a quicker pace, leap over all the further conversation between Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Granty, and also an intervening space of three days, merely premising that during that period, from a great number of knots on the tangled string of events, neither Mary Clifford nor Isabella Slingsby had any opportunity of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp for more than two minutes in private. Those two minutes were employed by Miss Clifford, to whose lot they fell, in telling him, with a hesitating and varying colour, that she very much wished for a short conversation with him. Beauchamp was surprised, but he answered with courtesy and kindness, and wished her to proceed at once. Sir John Slingsby was upon them the next moment, however, and the matter was deferred.

Thus went the three days I have mentioned, but on the morning of the fourth, just about half-past five, when everybody but skylarks are supposed to be asleep, Beauchamp and our friend Ned Hayward entered the small meadow, just under the trees by the palings of Tarningham Park, on the side next to Tarningham, near the spot where the river issued forth into the field on its onward progress. They were followed by a man, carrying a mahogany case, bound with brass, and a gentleman in a black coat, with a surgical air about him; for, strange, human nature seldom goes out to make a hole in another piece of human nature, without taking precautions for mending it as soon as made.

Beauchamp took out his watch, and satisfied himself that they were to their time, spoke a few words to the surgeon, unlocked the mahogany box, looked at some of the things it contained, and then walked up and down the field with Ned Hayward for a quarter of an hour.

"This is too bad, Hayward," he said, at length; "I think we might very well now retire."

"No, no," said Hayward; "give him law enough, one can never tell what may stop a man. He shall have another quarter of an hour. Then, if he does not come, he shall have the horsewhipping."

Ten minutes more passed, and then two other gentlemen entered the field, with a follower, coming up at a quick pace; and with heated brows.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen—ah," said Mr. Granty, advancing; but we have had the devil's own work—ah—to

get the tools—ah. My friend, Wittingham, was knocked down by a fellow—ah—that he was sending for cash, so that I had to furnish—ahem.”

“Never mind all this,” said Beauchamp; “you are now here, though you have kept my friend waiting. We had better proceed to business at once, as I have had a hint that, from a slight indiscretion on your part, sir, in mentioning this matter before a clergyman, inquiries have been made which may produce inconvenient results.”

Mr. Granty was somewhat nettled; but neither Beauchamp nor Hayward attended to any of his “ahs;” the ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the two gentlemen placed on their ground, and then came the unpleasant “one two—three.” Both fired instantly, and the next moment Harry Wittingham reeled and dropped. Beauchamp thought he saw Ned Hayward waver slightly, more as if the pistol had recoiled violently in his hand than anything else; but, as soon as his antagonist fell, the young officer ran up to him, stooped, and raised his head.

The surgeon came up directly, and opened the wounded man’s coat and waistcoat, as he lay with his face as pale as ashes. At the same moment, however, there was a cry of “Hie, hie!” and, turning round, Beauchamp saw the poor little pot-boy, Billy Lamb, scampering across the field as hard as he could go.

“Run, run!” cried the boy; “there are the magistrates and the constables all coming up—run over by the stile there; I brought the chaise to the end of the lane.”

“I can’t go,” said Ned Hayward, “till I hear what is to come of this.”

“You had better go,” said the surgeon, looking up; “it does not seem to me to be dangerous, but you may get into prison if you stay. No, it has shattered a rib, but passed round. He will do well, I think. Run, run!—I can see the people coming.”

Beauchamp took Ned Hayward’s arm; and drew him away. In two minutes they had reached the chaise and were rolling on; but then Ned Hayward leaned back somewhat languidly, and said,—

“I wish, Beauchamp, you would just tie your handkerchief tight round my shoulder here, for it is bleeding more than I thought, and I feel sickish.”

“Good Heavens! are you hurt?” exclaimed Beauchamp; and, opening his waistcoat, he saw that the whole right side of Ned’s shirt was steeped in blood.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Do not be continually changing the scene," says the critic; "do not run from character to character; introduce no personage who does not tend to bring about some result;" but in the course of human events the scene is always shifting; the characters which pass before our eyes, cross and return at every instant, and innumerable personages flit before us like shadows over a glass, leaving no trace of their having been. Others, indeed, appear for an instant, not only on the limited stage of domestic life, but often on the great scene of the world, act their appointed part, produce some particular effect, and then, like those strange visitants of our system, the comets, rush back into the depths, from which they emerged but for an hour.

All this has been written to prove that it is perfectly right and judicious that I should introduce my beloved reader into the study of Mr. Wharton, or rather Abraham Wharton, Esq., solicitor, and attorney-at-law, somewhere about a fortnight after the duel between Captain Hayward and young Wittingham. Mr. Wharton was a small, spare, narrow man, of a tolerably gentlemanlike figure; and, to look at his back, one of those prepossessions which lead us all by the nose, made one believe that his face must be a thin, sharp, fox-like face, probably with a dark black beard, closely shaved, making the muzzle look blue.

On getting round in front, however, the surprise of the new acquaintance was great to see a red and blotchy countenance, with sharp, black eyes, and very little beard at all. There was generally a sweet simper upon his lips, intended to be courteous, but that simper, like an exchequer bill, was very easily convertible, and a poor client, an inferior solicitor on the opposite side, or an unready debtor, soon found that it would be changed into heavy frowns or sarcastic grins.

Mr. Wharton was very proper and accurate in his dress. His coat was always black—even when he went out to hunt, which was not a rare occurrence, he never sported the red jacket. In riding he would occasionally indulge in leather, elsewhere than from the knee downwards; but the habiliment of the lower man was, upon all ordinary occasions, a pair of dark gray pantaloons. He was now so habited in his study, as he called the room behind that where seven clerks were seated, for the business he was

engaged in was one in the ordinary course, though of extraordinary interest to Mr. Wharton. It was, in short, the consummation of plucking a poor bird which had been entrapped long before. Now, it was not intended to leave him a feather, and yet Mr. Wharton was inclined to do the thing as decorously as possible. By decorously I do not mean tenderly—such an unnecessary delicacy never entered into Mr. Wharton's head. The decorum that he thought of was merely the seeming in the world's eyes, as a great deal of other decorum is, both male and female. He was about to be as hard, as relentless, as iron-hearted as a cannon ball, but all with infinite professions of kindness and good feeling, and sorrow for the painful necessity, &c. &c. &c., for Mr. Wharton followed Dr. Kitchener's barbarous recipe for devouring oysters, and "tickled his little favourites before he ate them."

The lawyer was standing at a table with some papers before him—not too many—for he was not like those bankrupt attorneys of the capital, who fill their rooms with brown tin cases, marked in large white letters "House of Lords." He preferred as little show of business as possible. His object now-a-days was, not to get practice, but to make money. Practice enough he had—too much for the common weal.

A clerk—a sort of private secretary, indeed—was sitting at the other end of the table, and the two had discussed one or two less important affairs, affecting a few hundred pounds, when Mr. Wharton at length observed, "I think, to-morrow is the last day with Sir John Slingsby, Mr. Pilkington, is it not?"

He knew quite well that it was; but, it would seem, he wished to hear his clerk's opinion upon the subject.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington; "I don't see a chance for him."

"Nor I either," answered Mr. Wharton; "I am afraid he is quite run out, poor man. The six months' notice of foreclosure was all right, and the interest now amounts to a large sum."

"A very large sum indeed, sir, with the costs," answered Mr. Pilkington; "you don't think, sir, he'll attempt to revise the costs or haggle about the interest?"

"He can't, Mr. Pilkington," replied Mr. Wharton, drily; "the costs are all secured by bond and accounts passed, and it was a client of mine who advanced him the money at seven-and-a-half, to pay the interest every six months on my mortgage. I had nothing to do with the transaction."

Mr. Pilkington smiled, and Mr. Wharton proceeded.

"Why, you know quite well, Pilkington, that it was Dyer who advanced the money, and his bankruptcy brought the bonds into my hands."

"I thought there was only one bond, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington; "you told me to have a fresh bond every six months for the running interest and the arrears, and the interest upon former advances, to guard against loss."

Mr. Wharton now smiled and nodded his head, saying, —for he was vain of his shrewdness, and vanity is a weak passion,— "True, true, Pilkington, but last half-year I saw that things were coming to a close, and therefore thought it better to have two bonds. It looks more regular, though the other is the most convenient mode."

"And, besides, it secures the interest on the last half-year's interest," said Pilkington; but to this observation Mr. Wharton made no reply, turning to another part of the same subject.

"Just bid Raymond to step down to Mr. Wittingham's," said the lawyer, "and tell him, with my compliments, I should be glad to speak with him for a minute. I must give him a hint of what is going on."

"Why, sir," said Mr. Pilkington, hesitating, "you know he has a bond too, out on the same day, and he'll be sure to go before you."

"I know, I know," answered Mr. Wharton, but I should like him to be the first, Pilkington."

"Will there be enough to cover all?" asked the clerk, doubtfully.

"Ample," answered his great man; "besides, the whole sum coming thundering down at once will ensure that no one will be fool enough to help. I have heard, indeed, something about a friend who would advance money to pay Wittingham's bond. Let him!—all the better; that cannot supersede my debt. Wittingham will get his money, and Sir John won't easily find much more on any security he has to offer. Besides, when some one begins, it gives the very best reason for others going on, and Wittingham won't be slow, depend upon it. Tell Mr. Raymond to fetch him."

The clerk retired, not venturing to urge any more objections; but when he returned again, Mr. Wharton himself continued the conversation thus:—

"Wittingham is a curious person to deal with; one does not always know what can be his objects."

Mr. Wharton had always an object himself, and therefore he fancied that no man could act without one. He

never took the impulse of passion, or the misdirection of folly, or the pig-headedness of obstinacy, into account. However, with Mr. Wittingham he was in some degree right, as to his generally having an object; but he was in some degree wrong also, for all the other causes of human wrong-going, passion, folly, and pig-headedness, had their share in the modes, methods, and contrivances, by which the worthy magistrate sought his ends.

"Now, what can be the meaning," continued Mr. Wharton, "of his opposing so strongly all steps against this Mr. Beauchamp and that Captain Hayward, who were engaged in the duel with his son?"

"They say he had quarrelled with Harry Wittingham, and disinherited him," replied the clerk; "and old Mrs. Billiter, the housekeeper, is quite furious about it. She declares that it is all old Wittingham's fault; that if it had not been for him, nothing of the kind would have happened; and that he murdered the young man. I do not know what it all means; but they say she will nurse Harry Wittingham through it after all."

Mr. Wharton mused for a minute or two, and then said, "You do not mean he is out of danger?"

"Oh dear, no, sir!" answered Mr. Pilkington, who perceived a slightly dissatisfied twang in his superior's question; "Mr. Slattery, the surgeon, said he might sink at any time for the next ten days."

"Humph," said Mr. Wharton, "that is all right! It will keep the others out of the way for some time to come; and a very good thing, too, for Mr. Beauchamp himself. He it is who is treating for the Moreton Hall estate; there is a little hitch in the business, which will be soon removed; but he seems to me just the sort of man who would take Sir John Slingsby's mortgage as an investment, as soon as the other. At all events, he might create difficulties in a business which had better be settled as soon as possible, for all parties, and might burn his own fingers, poor man, into the bargain. You had the bills posted up, Pilkington?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the clerk. "for twenty miles round, offering a reward. There is no fear, sir. They are safe enough—most likely in France by this time."

Mr. Wharton seemed satisfied; and, after a few minutes, worthy Mr. Wittingham entered the office, and was thence ushered into the study; but, alas! it was no longer the Mr. Wittingham of former days. The somewhat fresh complexion—the stiff, consequential carriage—the vulgar swagger, were all gone; and Mr. Wittingham

looked a very sick old gentleman, indeed; weak in the knees, bent in the back, and sallow in the face. The wig was ill-adjusted, the Melton coat a world too wide; you could have put a finger between the knee-bands of the breeches and the stockings; and the top-boots slipped down almost to the ankles. It was marvellous how one who had been so tall and thin before, could have become, to the eye, so much taller and thinner. The great Prince of Parma wrote despatches, reviewed troops, and conducted a negotiation, within one hour before a long and lingering malady terminated in death. He knew he was dying, and yet went through all his ordinary business, as if he had only to dress and go out to a party instead of into his grave. This was a wonderful instance of the persistence of character under bodily infirmity, or rather, of its triumph over corporeal decay. But that of Mr. Wittingham was more remarkable. The external Wittingham was woefully changed: his oldest friend would not have known him; but the internal Wittingham was still the same; there was not a tittle of difference. He was not in the least softened, he was not in the least brightened: his was one of those granite natures, hard to cut, and impossible to polish. Although he had very little of the diamond in him, yet, as the diamond can only be shaped by the powder of the diamond, nothing but Wittingham could touch Wittingham. His own selfishness was the only means by which he was accessible.

"Ah, Mr. Wharton," he said, "you sent for me; what is in the wind, now? Not about these two young men any more, I trust? That account is closed. I will have nothing to do with it. Henry Wittingham called out this Captain Hayward; Captain Hayward was fool enough to go out with Henry Wittingham. They each had a shot, and the balance struck was a pistol-ball against Henry Wittingham. Perhaps, if all the items had been reckoned, the account might have been heavier, but I am not going to open the books again. I should not find anything to the credit of my son, depend upon it."

"Oh, no, my good friend," said Mr. Wharton, in the most amiable tone possible; "I knew the subject was disagreeable to you, and therefore never returned to the business again. The other magistrates did what they thought their duty required, in offering a reward, &c., but as you had a delicacy in meddling where your son was concerned, the matter was not pressed upon you."

"Delicacy! fiddlesticks' ends!" retorted Mr. Wittingham. "I never had a delicacy in my life!—I did not

choose! That is the proper word. But if it was not about this, why did you send for me?"

"Why, my dear sir," said Mr. Wharton, "I thought it due in honour to give you a hint—as I know you are a large creditor of Sir John Slingsby—that matters are not going altogether well there."

"I have known that these six years," answered the magistrate. "Honour, indeed! You have a great deal to do with honour, and delicacy, and all that; but I am a man of business, and look to things as matters of business. Speak more plainly, Wharton; what is there going worse than usual at the Park? Does he want to borrow more money?"

"He did a fortnight ago, and could not get it," replied Mr. Wharton, drily; for the most impudent rogue in the world does not like to feel himself thoroughly understood. "But the short and the long of the matter is this, my good sir:—Sir John can go on no longer. 'Six months' notice of foreclosure is out to-morrow; other steps must be taken immediately; large arrears of interest are due; two or three bonds with judgment are hanging over our poor friend; and you had better look after yourself."

"Well, well, there is time enough yet," said Mr. Wittingham, in a much less business-like tone than Mr. Wharton expected; "the preliminaries of the law are somewhat lengthy, Mr. Wharton? *fi-fas* and *ca-sas* take some time; and I will think of the matter."

"As you please, my good friend," answered Wharton; "only just let me hint, that all the preliminaries have been already gone through. An execution will be put in early to-morrow; there are a good many creditors, and there may be a sort of a scramble, as the school-boys have it, where the quickest runner gets the biggest nut. I thought it but kind and fair to tell you, as a neighbour and a friend, especially as your debt is no trifle, I think."

"An execution early to-morrow!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham; "won't the estate pay all?"

"About two-thirds, I imagine," said Wharton, telling, as was his wont, a great lie with the coolest face possible.

"And what will Sir John do?" said the magistrate, "and poor Miss Slingsby?"

"I am afraid we must touch Sir John's person," replied the lawyer, with a sneer; "and as to poor Miss Slingsby, I see nothing for it, but that she should go out as a governess. But do not let us talk nonsense, Wittingham. You are a man of sense and of business. I have given you

a caution, and you will act upon it. That is all I have to do with the matter."

To Mr. Wharton's surprise, however, he did not find Mr. Wittingham so ready to act in the way he hinted as had been anticipated. The old gentleman hesitated, and doubted, and seemed so uneasy that the solicitor began to fear he had mistaken his character totally, to apprehend that, after all, he might be a kind-hearted, benevolent old gentleman. The reader, however, who has duly remarked the conversation between the magistrate on his sick-bed, and worthy Dr. Miles, may, perhaps, perceive other causes for Mr. Wittingham's hesitation. He had found that Sir John Slingsby possessed a secret which might hang his son. Now, although I do not mean at all to say that Mr. Wittingham wished his son to die, in any way, or that he would not have been somewhat sorry for his death, by any means, yet he would have much preferred that the means were not those of strangulation. To have his son hanged, would be to have his own consideration hanged. In short, he did not at all wish to be the father of a man who had been hanged; and, consequently, he was somewhat afraid of driving Sir John Slingsby into a corner. But each man, as Pope well knew, has some ruling passion, which is strong even in death. Sir John Slingsby owed Mr. Wittingham five thousand pounds; and Mr. Wittingham could not forget that fact. As he thought of it, it increased, swelled out, grew heavy, like a nightmare. To lose five thousand pounds at one blow! What was any other consideration to that? What was the whole Newgate Calendar, arranged as a genealogical tree, and appended to his name either as ancestry or posterity? Nothing, nothing! Dust in the balance! A feather in an air-pump! Mr. Wittingham grew exceedingly civil to his kind friend, Mr. Wharton; he compassionated poor Sir John Slingsby very much; he was sorry for Miss Slingsby; but he did not in the least see why, when other people were about to help themselves, he should not have his just right. He chatted over the matter with Mr. Wharton, and obtained an opinion from him, without a fee, as to the best mode of proceeding—and Mr. Wharton's opinions on such points were very sound; but in this case particularly careful. Then Mr. Wittingham went home, sent for his worthy solicitor, Mr. Bacon, whom he had employed for many years, as cheaper and safer than Mr. Wharton, and gave him instructions, which set the poor little attorney's hair on end.

Mr. Bacon knew Mr. Wittingham, however; he had

been accustomed to manage him at petty sessions; and he was well aware that it was necessary to set Mr. Wittingham in opposition to Mr. Wittingham, before he could hope that any one's opinion would be listened to. When those two respectable persons had a dispute together, there was some chance of a third being attended to who stepped in as an umpire.

But, in the present case, Mr. Bacon was mistaken. He did not say one word of the pity, and the shame, and the disgrace of taking Sir John Slingsby quite by surprise; but he started various legal difficulties, and, indeed, some formidable obstacles to the very summary proceedings which Mr. Wittingham contemplated. But that gentleman was as a gun loaded with excellent powder and well-crammed down shot, by Mr. Wharton; and the priming was dry and fresh. Mr. Bacon's difficulties were swept away in a moment; his obstacles leaped over; and the solicitor was astonished at the amount of technical knowledge which his client had obtained in a few hours.

There was nothing to be done but obey. Mr. Wittingham was too good a card to throw out: Sir John Slingsby was evidently ruined beyond redemption; and, with a sorrowful heart—for Mr. Bacon was, at bottom, a kind and well-disposed man—he took his way to his office with his eyes roaming from one side of the street to the other, as if he were looking for some means of escaping from a disagreeable task. As they thus roamed, they fell upon Billy Lamb, the little deformed pot-boy. The lawyer eyed him for a minute or so as he walked along, compared him in imagination with one of his own clerks, a tall, handsome-looking fellow, with a simpering face; thought that Billy would do best, though he was much more like a wet capon than a human being, and beckoning the boy into his office, retired with him into an inner-room, where Mr. Bacon proceeded so cautiously and diffidently, that, had not Billy Lamb's wits been as sharp as his face, he would have been puzzled to know what the solicitor wanted him to do.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was a dark, cold, cheerless night, though the season was summer, and the preceding week had been very warm—one of those nights when a cold cutting north-east wind has suddenly broken through the sweet dream of bright days, and checked the blood in the trees and

plants, withering them with the presage of winter. From noon till eventide that wind had blown; and although it had died away towards night, it had left the sky dark and the air chilly. Not a star was to be seen in the expanse above; and, though the moon was up, yet the light she gave only served to show that heavy clouds were floating over the heavens, the rounded edges of the vapours becoming every now and then of a dim white, without the face of the bright orb ever being visible for a moment. A dull, damp mist hung about the ground, and a faint smell, not altogether unpleasant, but sickly and oppressive, rose up, resembling that which is given forth by some kinds of water plants, and burdened the cold air.

In the little churchyard, at the back of Stephen Gimlet's cottage, there was a light burning, though ten o'clock had struck some quarter of an hour before; and an elderly man, dressed, notwithstanding the chilliness of the night, merely in a waistcoat with striped sleeves, might be seen by that light, which was nested in a horse-lantern, and perched upon a fresh-turned heap of earth. His head and shoulders were above the ground; and part of his rounded back, with ever and anon the rise and fall of a heavy pick-axe, appeared amongst the nettles and long hemlocks which overrun the churchyard. His legs and feet were buried in a pit which he was digging, and busily the sexton laboured away to hollow out the grave, muttering to himself from time to time, and sometimes even singing at his gloomy work. He was an old man, but he had no one to help him, and in truth he needed it not, for he was hale and hearty, and he put such a good will to his task, that it went on rapidly. The digging of a grave was to him a sort of festival. He held brotherhood with the worm, and gladly prepared the board for his kindred's banquet.

The grave-digger had gone on for some time, when, about the hour I have mentioned, some one paused at the side of the low mossy wall, about a hundred yards from the cottage of the new gamekeeper, and looked over towards the lantern. Whoever the visitor was, he seemed either to hesitate or to consider, for he remained with his arms leaning on the coping for fully five minutes before he opened the little wooden gate close by, and walking in, went up to the side of the grave. The sexton heard him well enough, but I never saw a sexton who was not a humorist, and he took not the least notice, working away as before.

"Why, what are you about, old gentleman?" said a man's voice, at length.

"Don't you see?" rejoined the sexton, looking up; "practising the oldest trade in the world but one—digging, to be sure—ay, and grave digging, too, which is a very ancient profession, likewise, though when first it began men lived so long, the sextons must have been but poor craftsmen for want of practice."

"And whose grave is it you are digging?" asked the visitor. "I have been here some days, and have not heard of any deaths."

"One would think you were a doctor," answered the sexton, "for you seem to fancy that you must have a hand in every death in the parish—but you want to know whose grave it is—well, I can't tell you, for I don't know myself."

"But who ordered you to dig it, then?" demanded the stranger.

"No one," said the sexton; "it will fit somebody, I warrant, and I shall get paid for it; and why should not I keep a ready-made grave, as a town cobbler keeps ready-made shoes? I am digging it out of my own fancy. There will be death somewhere before the week is out, I am sure; for I dreamed last night that I saw a wedding come to this church, and the bride and the bridegroom stepped on each of the grave hillocks as they walked—so there will be a death, that's certain, and may be two."

"And so you are digging the grave on speculation, old fellow?" exclaimed the other; "but I dare say you have a shrewd guess whom it is for. There is some poor fellow ill in the neighbourhood—or some woman in a bad way, ha?"

"It may be for the young man lying wounded up at Buxton's inn," answered the sexton; "they say he is better; but I should not wonder if it served his turn after all. But I don't know, there is never any telling who may go next. I've seen funny things in my day. Those who thought they had a long lease, find it was a short one: those who were wishing for other people's death, that they might get their money, die first themselves."

The sexton paused, and the stranger did not make any answer, looking gloomily down into the pit, as if he did not much like the last reflections that rose up from the bottom of the grave.

"Ay, funny things enough I have seen," continued the sexton, after giving a stroke or two with his pickaxe; but the funniest of all is, to see how folks take on at first for

those who are gone, and how soon they get over it. Lord what a lot of tears I have seen shed on this little bit of ground! and how soon they were dried up, like a shower in the sunshine. I recollect now there was a young lady sent down here for change of air by the London doctors, after they had poisoned her with their stuff, I dare say. A pretty creature she was as ever I set eyes on, and did not seem ill, only a bit of a cough. Her mother came with her, and then her lover, who was to be married to her when she got well. But at six months' end she died—there she lies, close on your left—and her lover, wasn't he terrible downcast? and he said to me when we had put her comfortably in the ground, 'I shan't be long after, sexton; keep me that place beside her—there's a guinea for you.' He did not come back, however, for five years, and then I saw him one day go along the road in a chaise and four, with a fine lady by his side, as gay as a lark."

"Well, you would not have the man go on whimpering all his life?" said the other. "How old are you, sexton?"

"Sixty and eight, last January," answered the other, "and I have dug these graves forty years, come St. John."

"Have you many old men in the parish?" asked the stranger.

"The oldest is eighty-two," replied the sexton, "and she is a woman."

"Six from eighty-two," said the stranger, in a contemplative tone, "that leaves seventy-six. That will do very well."

"Will it?" said the sexton; "well, you know best; but I should like to see a bit more of your face;" and as he spoke, the old man suddenly raised his lantern towards the stranger, and then burst out into a laugh—"ay, I thought I knew the voice!" he said; "and so you've come back again, Captain? Well, now, this is droll enough! That bone you've got your foot upon belongs to your old wet-nurse, Sally Loames, if I know this ground; and she had as great a hand in damaging you as any of the rest. She was a bad one! But what has brought you down, now that all the money's gone, and the property, too?"

"Why, I'll tell you," answered Captain Moreton, "I'll tell you, my good old Grindley. I want to see into the vault where the coffins are, and just to have a look at the register. Can't you help me? You used always to have the keys."

"No, no, Captain," rejoined the sexton, shaking his head; "no tricks! no tricks! I'm not going to put my head into a noose for nothing."

"Nobody wants you to put your head in a noose, Grindley," answered the other; "all I want, is just to take a look at the coffins for a minute, and another at the register, for I have had a hint that I have been terribly cheated, and that people have put my great-grandfather's death six years too early, which makes all the difference to me; for if my mother was born while he was living, she could not break the entail, do you see?"

"Well, then," said the sexton, "you can come tomorrow, Captain; and I'll tell the Doctor any hour you like."

"That won't do, Grindley," replied Moreton, "the parson is with the enemy; and, besides, I must not let anybody know that I have seen the register and the coffins, till I have everything prepared to upset their roguery. You would not have me lose my own, would you, old boy? Then as to your doing it for nothing, if you will swear not to tell that I have seen the things at all, till I am ready and give you leave, you shall have a ten-pound note."

It is a strange and terrible thing, that the value of that which has no value at all, except as it affects us in this world and this life, increases enormously in our sight as we are leaving them. The sexton had always been more or less a covetous man, as Captain Moreton well-knew; but the passion had increased upon him with years, and the bait of the ten-pound note was not to be resisted. He took up the lantern, he got out of the grave, and looked carefully round. It was late at night—all was quiet—nothing seemed stirring; and approaching close to Moreton's side, he said in a whisper,—

"No one knows that you were coming here, eh, Captain?"

"Nobody in the world," replied the other. "I called at your house an hour ago, and the girl told me that you were down here, but I said I would call on you again tomorrow."

"And you only want to look at the coffins and the book?" continued the sexton.

"Nothing else in the world," said Moreton, in an easy tone; "perhaps I may take a memorandum in my pocket-book—that's all."

"Well, then, give us the note, and come along," replied the sexton; "there can be no harm in that."

Moreton slipped something into his hand, and they moved towards a little door in the side of the church, opposite to that on which stood the cottage of Stephen Gimlet. Here the sexton drew a large bunch of keys out

of his pocket, and opened the door, holding up the lantern to let his companion see the way in.

Moreton whistled a bit of an opera air, but the old man put his hand on his arm, saying, in a low tone, "Hush! hush! what's the use of such noise?" And leading the way to the opposite corner, he chose one of the smallest of the keys on his bunch, and stooped down, kneeling on one knee by the side of a large stone in the pavement, marked with a cross and a star, and having a keyhole in it, covered with a brass plate made to play in the stone. The old man put in the key and turned it, but when he attempted to lift the slab, it resisted. "There, you must get it up for yourself," he said, rising—"I can't. Take hold of the key, and with your young arm, you'll soon get it up, I dare say."

Moreton did as the other directed, and raised the slab without difficulty. When he had done, he quietly put the keys in his pocket, saying, "Give me the lantern!"

But Mr. Grindley did not like the keys being in Captain Moreton's pocket, and though he thought it was not worth while to make a piece of work about it, yet he kept the lantern, and went down first. A damp, close smell, met them on the flight of narrow stone steps, which the old lords of the manor had built down into their place of long repose: and the air was so dark, that it seemed as if the blackness of all the many long nights which had passed since the vault was last opened had accumulated and thickened there.

For some moments, the faint light of the lantern had no effect upon the solid gloom; but as soon as it began to melt, the old man walked on, saying, "This way, Captain. I think it used to stand hereabouts, upon the trestles, to the right. That is your father's to the left, and then there's your mother's; and next, there's your little sister, who died when she was a baby—all lying snug together. The Moretons—that is the old Moretons—are over here. Here's your grandfather—a jolly old dog, I recollect him well, with his large stomach and his purple face—and then his lady—I did not know her—and then two or three youngsters. You see, young and old, they all come here, one time or another. This should be your great grandfather," and he held up the lantern to the top of one of the coffins. "No," he said, after a brief examination, "that is the Colonel who was killed in '45. Why they put him here I don't know, for he died long before your great grandfather. But here the old gentleman is. He lived to a great age, I know."

"Let me see!" said Captain Moreton; and approaching the side of the coffin, he made the old man hold the lantern close to the plate upon the top. The greater part of the light was shed upon the coffin lid, though some rays stole upwards, and cast a sickly glare upon the two faces that hung over the last resting-place of the old baronet. Captain Moreton put his hand in his pocket, at the same time pointing with the other to a brass plate, gilt, which bore a short inscription upon it, somewhat obscure, from dust and verdigris.

"There! it is quite plain," he said; "1766!"

The old sexton had been fumbling for a pair of spectacles, and now he mounted them on his nose, and looked closer, saying, "No, Captain, 1760."

"Nonsense!" said the other, sharply; "it is the dust covers the tail of the six. I'll show you in a minute;" and as quick as light, he drew the other hand from his pocket, armed with a sharp steel instrument, of a very peculiar shape. It was like a stamp for cutting pastry, only much smaller, with the sharp edge formed like a broken sickle. Before the old man could see what he was about to do, he pressed his hand, and the instrument it contained, tight upon the plate, gave it a slight turn, and withdrew it.

"Lord 'a mercy! what have you done?" exclaimed the sexton.

"Nothing, but taken off the dust," answered Moreton, with a laugh; "look at it now! Is it not 66 plain enough?"

"Ay, that it is," said Grindley. "But this won't do, Captain—this won't do."

"By — it shall do," replied the other, fiercely; "and if you say one word, you will not only lose the money, but get hanged into the bargain; for the moment I hear you've 'peached, I'll make a full confession, and say you put me up to the trick. So now, my old boy, you are in for it, and had better go through with it like a man. If we both hold our tongues, nothing can happen. We slip out together, and no one knows a syllable; but if we are fools, and chatter, and don't help each other, we shall both get into an infernal scrape. You will suffer most, however—I'll take care of that. Then, on the contrary, if I get back what they have cheated me and my father out of, you shall have 100*l.* for your pains."

At first, the sexton was inclined to exclaim and protest; but Captain Moreton went on so long, that he had time to reflect, and—being a man of quick perceptions—to make up his mind. At first, too, he looked angrily in his companion's face, through his spectacles, holding up the lantern

to see him well; but gradually he dropped the light and his eyes together to the coffin-lid, examined it thoughtfully, and in the end said, in a low, quiet, significant voice, "I think, Captain, the tail of that six looks somewhat bright and sharp, considering how old it is."

The compact was signed and sealed by those words; and Moreton replied, "I've thought of all that, old gentleman. It shall be as green as the rest by to-morrow morning."

Thus saying, he took out a small phial of a clear liquid, dropped a few drops on the plate, and rubbed them into the deep mark he had made. Then turning gaily to his companion, he exclaimed, "Now for the register."

Grindley made no reply; and they walked up into the church again, put down the slab of stone, locked it, and advanced towards the vestry. There, however, the old man paused at the door, saying, in a low, shaking voice, "I can't, Captain!—I can't! It is forgery—nothing else. I'll stay here; you go and do what you like—you've the keys."

"Where are the books kept?" asked the other, speaking low.

"In the great chest," said the sexton. "It must be the second book from the top."

"Can I find pen and ink?" inquired Moreton.

"On the table—on the table," answered Grindley. "Mathew Lomax had a child christened two days ago. But it won't never look like the old ink."

"Never you fear," said the other worthy: "I am provided;" and taking the lantern, he opened the vestry-door, and went in.

Captain Moreton set down the lantern on a little table, covered with green cloth, and proceeded about his work, quietly and deliberately. He was no new offender, though this was a new sort of offence; he had none of the young timidity of incipient crime about him: he had done a great many unpleasant things on great inducements—pigeoned confiding friends, made friendship for the sake of pigeoning, robbed Begums, as was the custom in those days, shot two or three intimate acquaintances who did not like being wronged, and was, moreover, a man of a hardy constitution, so that his nerves were strong and unshaken. He tried two or three keys before he found the one which fitted the lock of the chest. He took out two volumes of registers, and examined the contents; soon found the passage he was looking for, and then searched for the pen and ink, which, after all, were not upon the table, but in

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the window. Then he tried the pen upon his thumb-nail, and took out his little bottle again, for it would seem that within that phial was some fluid which had a double operation—namely, that of corroding brass and rendering ink pallid. The register was laid open before him, a stool drawn to the table, his hand pressed tight upon the important page, and the pen between his fingers and thumb to keep all steady in the process of converting 1760 into 1766, when an unfortunate fact struck him—namely, that there were a great many insertions between the two periods. He paused to consider how this was to be overcome, when suddenly he heard an exclamation from without, and the sound of running steps in the church, as if some one was scampering away in great haste. He had forgotten—it was the only thing he had forgotten—to turn his face to the door, and he was in the act of attempting to remedy this piece of neglect, by twisting his head over his shoulder, when he received a blow upon the cheek which knocked him off his stool, and stretched him on the pavement of the vestry. He started up instantly, but before he could see anything or anybody, the lantern was thrown down, and the door of the vestry shut and bolted, leaving him a prisoner in the dark.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TARNINGHAM Park was exceedingly quiet; for Sir John Slingsby was out at dinner some five miles off, and his merry activity being removed, every living thing seemed to think itself entitled to take some repose. Mrs. Clifford, who had been far from well for several days, and had not quitted her room during the whole morning, had gone to bed; Mary and Isabella were conversing quietly—perhaps sadly—in the drawing-room; the butler snored in the pantry; the ladies' maids and footmen were enjoying a temporary calm in their several spheres; and cook, scullions, and housemaids were all taxing their energies to do nothing with the most meritorious perseverance. Even the hares hopped more deliberately upon the lawns, and the cock-pheasants strutted with more tranquil grandeur. Every one seemed to know that Sir John Slingsby was absent, and that there was no need to laugh, or talk, or dance, or sing, or eat, or drink, more than was agreeable. The very air seemed to participate in the general feeling, for, whereas it had been somewhat bois-

terous and keen during the day, it sunk into a calm, heavy, chilly sleep towards night, and the leaves rested motionless upon the trees, as if weary of battling with the wind.

"We will have a fire, Mary," said Isabella; "though it be summer in the calendar, it is winter in the field, and I do not see why we should regulate our comfort by the almanac. Papa will not be home till twelve, and though he will be warm enough, I dare say, that will do nothing for us."

As she spoke, she rose to ring the bell; but at the same moment another bell rang, being that of the chief entrance, and both Miss Slingsby and her cousin looked aghast at the idea of a visitor. Some time elapsed before their apprehensions were either confirmed or removed; for there was a good deal of talking at the glass door; but at first the servant did not choose to come in with any explanation. At length, however, a footman appeared, in very white stockings and laced knee-bands, saying, with a grin, "If you please, ma'am, there is little Billy Lamb at the door wishes to see you. He asked for Sir John first. I told him he couldn't, for you were engaged; but he said he was sure you would, and teased me just to tell you he was here."

"Billy Lamb!" said Isabella. "Who is that?—Oh, I remember: is not that the poor boy at the White Hart?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the footman; "the little hump-back that you gave half-a-crown to one day when he was whistling so beautiful."

"Oh, I will see him, of course," said Isabella, much to the footman's amazement, who could not see the "of course;" "I will come out and speak with him."

"Have him brought in here, Bella," said Mary. "I know the poor boy well, and his mother, too. The poor daughter is dead; she married badly, I believe, and died two or three years ago."

"Bring him in," said Miss Slingsby to the servant; and the man retired to fulfil her commands. As Billy Lamb entered the room, the two fair girls, both so beautiful, yet so unlike each other, advanced towards the door to meet him; and stood before the poor deformed boy, leaning slightly towards each other, with their arms linked together. The boy remained near the entrance, and the footman held the door open behind him till Miss Slingsby nodded her head as an intimation that his presence was not required.

"Well, William," said Isabella, as the man departed, "how are you, and what is it you want?"

"And your poor mother, William?" said Mary Clifford—"I have not seen her a long while—how is she?"

"She is much better, thank you, ma'am," replied the boy. "She is reconciled with Stephen, now, and has gone to be with him up in the cottage, and take care of his little boy, my poor sister's orphan; and so she is much better." Then turning to Isabella, he went on—"I am quite well thank you, miss; but somehow my heart is very down just now, for I came up to tell Sir John something very terrible and very bad."

"Is it magistrate's business, William? or can I give you any help?" asked Isabella.

"Oh dear, no, Miss Slingsby," replied the boy, "it is not about myself at all, but about Sir John;" and he looked up in her face with his clear, bright, intelligent eyes, as if beseeching her to understand him without forcing him to further explanations.

But Isabella did not understand him at all; and she inquired—"What do you mean, my good lad? I am sure my father will be glad to do anything he can for you; and I do not think that you would yourself do anything very terrible and very bad, such as you speak of."

"Hush, Isabella!" said Mary Clifford, whose heart was a more apprehensive one than her cousin's, and who had some glimmering of dangers or sorrows hidden under the boy's obscure words: "Let him explain himself. Tell us, William, exactly what you mean. If wrong has been done you, we will try to make it right; but you spoke of my uncle: has anything happened to Sir John?"

"No, Miss Mary," replied Billy Lamb, "but I fear evil may happen to him if something is not done to stop it."

"But of what kind?" asked Isabella, anxiously: "tell us all about it. What is it you fear? Where did you get your information?"

"From Mr. Racon," answered the boy, simply, "the little lawyer at Tarningham, ma'am. He's not a bad man, nor an unkind man either, like Mr. Wharton; and, though he did not just bid me come up and tell Sir John, yet he said he very much wished he knew what was going to happen. Then he said he could not write about it, for it was no business of his, as he was but acting for others, and he did not like to send a message, because——"

"But what is it?" exclaimed Mary Clifford and Isabella together. "In pity's name, my good boy, do not keep us in suspense!"

"Why, ma'am, he said," continued the boy, in a sad tone, and casting down his eyes, "that to-morrow there

would be an execution put in here—that means that they will seize everything. I know that, for they did so six months after my father died. Then he said that very likely Sir John would be arrested, unless he could pay five thousand pounds down at once.”

Isabella sank into a chair overwhelmed, exclaiming, “Good Heaven!”

“This is what Captain Hayward told us of!” said Mary Clifford, putting her hand to her brow, and speaking rather to herself than to her cousin. “How unfortunate that he should be absent now! This duel, depend upon it, has prevented him from taking the means he proposed for averting this blow. I feel sure he could and would have done as he promised.”

“Oh, whatever Ned Hayward promised he was able to perform,” answered Isabella; “nothing but some unfortunate circumstance, such as this duel, has prevented him. He is as true and open as the day, Mary. What would I not give for but five minutes’ conversation with him now.”

“Would you? Would you?” said the musical voice of the poor boy. “I think, if you want them, you can have them very soon.”

“Oh, you dear good boy!” cried Isabella, starting up, “send him here directly, if you know where he is. Tell him that my father’s safety depends entirely upon him tell him we are ruined if he does not come.”

“I do not think I can send him,” said the boy, in a disappointed tone. “I don’t think he can come; but if you like to go and see him, I will venture to take you where he is; for I am sure you would not do him a great injury, and say anything of where he is hid.”

“Go to him?” exclaimed Isabella; “why, it is growing quite dark, my good William. How can I go? But this is folly and weakness,” she exclaimed, the next moment; “when my father’s liberty and character are at stake, shall I hesitate to go anywhere? I will go, William. Where is it? Is it far?”

“Stay, dear Isabella,” said her cousin; “if needful I will go with you. This is a case which I think may justify what would be otherwise improper. But let me ask one or two questions. You say Mr. Bacon told you this, William. If he wished my uncle to know the facts, why did he not send one of his clerks?”

“Why, he said, Miss Mary, that he had no right,” answered the boy; “he seemed in a great flurry, and as if he did not well know what to do; but he asked if I

had seen Sir John in town; for he generally comes to the 'White Hart,' you know; and told me to let him know if I chanced to meet with him in town, because he wanted to speak with him exceedingly. And then he went on that he did not know that he ought to tell him either; for he had got an execution to take to-morrow, here, and to have a writ against him the first thing to-morrow; and a great deal more that I forget. But he said he was very sorry, and would almost give one of his hands not to have it to do. At last, he said I was not to tell anybody in the town what he had said, but that I might tell Sir John if I saw him; so I came away here, miss, as soon as I could."

"But where is Captain Hayward to be found, then?" asked Miss Clifford. "You must tell us that, before we can make up our minds, William."

"I may as well tell you as take you," replied the boy; "but I must go on before, to say you are coming. He is at Ste Gimlet's, with him and my mother, and has been there ever since he shot Mr. Wittingham."

"Oh, I shall not mind going there," cried Isabella; "it will not call for observation from the servants; but if he had been at an inn it would have been terrible."

Mary Clifford smiled; for she was one of those who valued proprieties nearly at their right worth, if not quite. She never violated them rashly: for no pleasure, or amusement, or mere personal gratification, would she transgress rules which society had framed, even though she might think them wrong or foolish; but with a great object, a good purpose, and a clear heart, she was ready to set them at naught. "I will go very willingly with you, dear Bella," she said. "Captain Hayward went to London, I know, for the express purpose of providing the means of averting this calamity; but, from some words which he let drop, I fancy he believed that it was not likely to fall upon us so soon. There is no way that I see of aiding your father but by seeing and consulting with this old friend. You said all this would happen early to-morrow, William?" she continued, turning again to the boy.

"As soon as it is light, Miss Mary," replied poor Billy Lamb.

"Oh, Heaven! I will order the carriage directly," said Isabella; "run on, there's a good lad! and tell Captain Hayward I am coming. You can tell him why, and all about it."

The boy retired, and sped away by the shortest paths towards his brother-in-law's cottage. In the meanwhile the carriage was ordered; but Sir John had got the

chariot with him ; the barouche had not been out for some time ; and the coachman thought fit to dust it. Three-quarters of an hour passed ere the lamps were lighted and all was ready, and then a footman, with gold-laced hat in hand, stood by the side of the vehicle, to hand the ladies in and accompany them. Isabella, however, told him that he would not be wanted, and gave the order to drive to Stephen Gimlet's cottage.

"Ay!" said the footman, as he turned into the house again, "Billy Lamb's mother is there. Now they'll do the young ladies out of a guinea or two, I'll warrant. What fools women are, to be sure!"

The first object she saw straight before her on arriving there was Mr. Beauchamp, who was standing in the midst of the little parlour of the cottage, talking to the poor boy, Billy Lamb, while Mrs Lamb and Stephen Gimlet were placed near the wide cottage hearth.

The moment that Miss Slingsby's face appeared, Beauchamp turned from the boy, saying,—

"Here are the ladies themselves. Now go home, my good boy ; and if your master is angry at your absence, tell him I will explain all to him. My dear Miss Slingsby, I am delighted to see you and your fair cousin. The boy says you wish to speak with Captain Hayward. He is in the room above. I will tell him immediately ;" and, after shaking hands with both of the ladies, he turned away, and went up stairs.

Mary whispered eagerly with Isabella ; and Stephen Gimlet touched his mother-in-law's arm, as he saw that there was evidently a good deal of agitation in their fair visitors' manner, saying,—

"Come, Goody, it won't give you cold, I dare say, to walk out for a bit with me. They'll want to talk together," he added, in a low voice, "and if it's cold, we'll go into the little vestry of the church."

The old woman looked towards the back room, where the child was sleeping ; but Stephen answered her, ere she spoke, whispering,—

"No, no, we should hear it all there."

Goody Lamb put her shawl over her head, while he took down the key of the church ; and Mary's eye catching their movements, she said,—

"Only for a few minutes, Mrs. Lamb. I should like to speak with you when we have said a word or two to Captain Hayward."

Mrs. Lamb dropped a curtsy, and went out with her

son-in-law ; and the next moment a slow step was heard coming down the stairs.

"Good Heaven! you are ill, Captain Hayward!" cried Isabella, as her father's friend presented himself, followed by Beauchamp. Mary Clifford said nothing, but she felt more.

"Oh, I shall soon be well again, my dear Miss Slingsby," answered Ned Hayward ; "the ball is out, and I am recovering quite fast—only a little weak."

"Hayward tells me I shall not be one too many," said Beauchamp ; "but if I am, Miss Slingsby, send me away ; remembering, however, that you may command me in any other way as well as that."

What a difference there is between enterprise and execution! How the difficulties grow upon us at every step of the mountain path, and how faint the heart feels at the early obstacles which we had altogether overlooked. Isabella Slingsby had thought it would be the easiest thing in the world to enter upon the state of her father's affairs with Ned Hayward. He was so old a friend ; he had known her father since he was sixteen years of age ; he had himself given the first warning, had opened the way. It had seemed to her, indeed, that there would not be the slightest difficulty, that there could not be any obstacle ; but now, when she had to speak of all, her heart sank, her courage failed her ; and she strove to turn the conversation to any other subject—only for a moment, till she recovered thought and breath.

"Oh, no! Do not go, Mr. Beauchamp," she said. "But how ill Captain Hayward looks. We had no idea he had been wounded. They said that Mr. Wittingham was the only sufferer."

"I can assure you, it is nothing," replied Ned Hayward ; "but you must sit down, my dear young lady ;" and with his left arm he put a seat for Miss Slingsby, while Beauchamp did the same good office for Mary Clifford. "I am sure that you have something important to say, and I guess what it is," the young officer continued. "Miss Clifford, you told your cousin a very painful communication I made to you ten or twelve days ago. Is it not so ? and she has come to speak upon that subject ?"

"I did, Captain Hayward," answered Mary Clifford ; "I told her all you had said—and your generous and noble offer to assist Sir John in the most pressing emergency. Her own knowledge confirmed in a great degree the fact of great danger ; but we feared that this unfortu-

nate duel might have interfered with your plans, and knew not where to find you, or communicate with you."

"I did not forget what I had undertaken," answered Ned Hayward; "but, like a thoughtless fool as I am, I forgot I might be wounded, Miss Clifford, or that I might be forced to run for it. Well may the good people call me thoughtless Ned Hayward; for I remembered that I might be killed, and provided against it; but I did not recollect anything else, and ordered the money to be remitted to the bank here at Tarningham. The ball went into my shoulder, however, and I have been unable to write ever since; otherwise I would have sent the cheque long ago, to be used whenever it was needed. I hope to be able to write as well as ever in a few days; so put your mind quite at ease upon that score. As for the mortgage, which is, I suppose, in train for immediate foreclosure, we must think what can be done some other way; for I am a poor man, as you know, and have not the means of lending the amount;" and as he spoke he turned his eye towards Beauchamp.

Ned Hayward calculated that there would be plenty of time to make all his arrangements; but such fancies were dissipated in a moment by Isabella's reply:—

"Did not the boy tell you," she asked, "that everything you feared is to take place to-morrow? He came up to warn us. That good little man, Bacon, the attorney, sent him."

"No, Isabella," said Mary Clifford, "he did not exactly send him; but he told him the facts, evidently that they might reach my uncle's ears; and the boy came up to tell us. I was sure, Captain Hayward," she added, with a glowing cheek, "that you would do what you could to aid, and that, if you could not aid, you would advise us how to act. We therefore came on here, without hesitation; for no time is to be lost, and Sir John is unfortunately out at dinner."

"Very luckily, rather," said Ned Hayward. "No time, indeed, is to be lost, if such be the state of things. I must write the cheque at once, some way or another. There is a pen and ink in my little room, I will go and get it."

"But can you write?" asked Mary, anxiously; "can you, without injury to yourself?"

"Nay, stay, Hayward, stay," said Beauchamp, "you mentioned the subject of the mortgage to me the other day. What is the amount? can you tell?"

"About fifty thousand pounds, and Heaven only knows

how much interest," answered Ned Hayward; "for I do not think Sir John has any idea."

"Nay, then I fear you must write the cheque," said Beauchamp, gravely; "for I must not diminish the amount in the bank; but I will get the pen and ink. We are a sort of prisoners here, Miss Slingsby, and dare not show ourselves till Mr. Wittingham's state is better ascertained, or we should long ago have endeavoured to put your mind at rest upon these subjects. However, we hear the young man is better, and therefore I trust we shall not be obliged to play at hide and seek much longer."

Thus saying, he went up the stairs again, but was several minutes ere he returned, during which time, though occasionally falling into fits of grave thought, Ned Hayward laughed and talked gaily; from time to time stealing a quiet look at the fair face of Mary Clifford, as she leaned her arm upon the table, and gazed somewhat sadly at the embers of the gamekeeper's fire.

At length Mr. Beauchamp made his appearance once more; and sitting down to the table with a cheque book before him, Ned Hayward, with a laugh, took the pen in his hand, saying,—

"I must dash it off in haste, or it will be pronounced a forgery. So here is for it," and with a rapid stroke or two he filled up the cheque for the sum of twelve thousand pounds, and signed his name. His cheek turned pale as he wrote; and Mary Clifford saw it, but that was the only sign of pain which he suffered to appear. Then, throwing down the pen, he took the paper with his left hand, and gave it to Miss Slingsby.

"There," he said, "I have had you on my knee twelve years ago, and called you dear little Bella; but I never thought you would give me so much pleasure as you do now."

"Well, Ned Hayward," exclaimed Isabella, with her eyes running over, "you are certainly the best and noblest creature in the world."

Mary Clifford's lips murmured something very like "He is."

Beauchamp looked on with an expression of grave pleasure; but scarcely was the cheque signed and given, when the door of the cottage opened suddenly, and Stephen Gimlet took a step over the threshold saying,—

"I have caught him, gentlemen; I have caught him, like a rat in a trap."

"Whom have you caught?" asked Beauchamp, turning quickly towards him.

"Why the fellow who fired the shot in at the window," answered Stephen Gimlet.

"That is glorious!" exclaimed Ned Hayward. "Where is he? What have you done with him?"

"I should not have troubled him, perhaps," said the gamekeeper, "if I had not found him meddling with the registers in the church, which I know he has no right to do. I and Goody Lamb went out for a bit into the churchyard, and, as she found the wind cold, we opened the little door at this side of the church, and went in. I had not been in a minute, when I heard some talking plain enough; but I could not see anybody for the life of me. I told Goody Lamb to stand behind the pillar by the pulpit, while I went to see; but before I could take a step, up out of the Moreton vault came two men with a lantern. One of them was this fellow, and the other was the old sexton; and they walked straight across towards the vestry; but, just a little way from the door, the old sexton stopped, and said, 'I can't, Captain; it is nothing better than forgery,' or something like that; and the other fellow took the lantern and went on into the vestry. So I said to Goody Lamb, in a whisper, 'Those rascals are up to no good;' and she answered, 'One of them never was, all his life.' So, then I said, 'You get forward and scare the old sexton; I'll be close behind you.' The old woman did it in a minute, walking on without any noise, till she was right between him and the light that came out of the vestry-door. However, he had heard us whisper, I fancy; for he was staring about him, as if he was looking for a ghost; and, as soon as he saw something standing there, off he set, as if the devil were behind him; and I jumped into the vestry, where the other fellow was sitting with one of the great books open before him, and a pen in his hand. I did not give him much time to think, but knocked him over, upset the lantern, and locked the door. So there he is in a cage, just like one of my ferrets."

"That's capital!" cried Ned Hayward; but Beauchamp looked very grave, and, turning to Gimlet, he said,—

"We'll consider what is to be done with him bye-and-bye. You can bring your good mother-in-law back now, Stephen; for our business is nearly over, and then you can see these two ladies safe to the carriage. Miss Slingsby," continued he, as soon as the gamekeeper was gone, "I wish to speak two words with you regarding this little note;" and he held one up before her. "I took advantage of the pen and ink before I brought it down, and

so kept you waiting, I'm afraid ; but it was not without a purpose."

Isabella hesitated for a moment ; but Beauchamp added, laughing,—

"Nay, surely you will trust yourself with me as far as the door."

"Oh, yes," replied Isabella, with a gay toss of her head ; "for I am doing all kinds of odd things to-night, and see no reason for stopping in mid course."

Thus saying, she walked towards the door, with Beauchamp following ; and they went out into the little garden, where Beauchamp put the note into her hand, saying,—

"This is addressed to Dr. Miles, my dear young lady. We are not very well aware of what has taken place regarding this mortgage, which Hayward has mentioned to me ; but I fear there is some foul play going on. Should any sudden inconvenience arise regarding it, or the interest upon it, send that note instantly to Dr. Miles, and, at the same time, take means to let me know."

"But how, my kind friend," asked Isabella, "how can I let you know, without discovering your place of concealment to others ? You are, doubtless, aware that there are placards all over the place, offering a reward for the apprehension of yourself and Captain Hayward ?"

"We must not mind that," answered Beauchamp ; "I must take my measures afterwards, as I find best. In the meantime, Dr. Miles will insure that your father is put to no inconvenience ; for it so luckily happens, that I have a large sum unemployed at the present moment, which could not be better employed than by saving you from distress and annoyance."

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp," cried Isabella, greatly moved, "what right have I to so much kindness and generosity ?"

"Every right that a fine and noble heart can give," answered Beauchamp : "and, oh, let me add, every right that can be bestowed by the most sincere affection that ever woman inspired in man—but I will not agitate you more to-night. This is not a moment when I can press such a topic upon you. There is only one thing you must promise, that you will suffer no consideration whatever to prevent you from availing yourself of the means of freeing your father from his difficulties—no, not even the rash words I have just spoken."

Isabella was silent for a moment ; but then she replied, in a low voice,—

"Those words would have quite the contrary effect."

They would give me confidence and hope ;" and she put her hand in his.

Beauchamp raised it to his lips, warmly, fully understanding all that her reply implied.

The devil is in a country apothecary. There is an awkward fatality about them which always brings them on the ground at the wrong moment.

"Good night—good night, Mr. Beauchamp," said Mr. Slattery of Tarningham, slowly walking his horse down the sandy lane. "I thought I would just step in to-see Captain Hayward, and tell you that Harry Wittingham is much better to-night ;" and Mr. Slattery was dismounting from his horse, not in the slightest degree with the intention of seeing whose hand Mr. Beauchamp had been kissing, but merely in the exercise of his professional avocations. As misfortune would have it, Beauchamp had left the cottage door open behind him, so that the surgeon had a fair view of the act by which that gentleman had sealed his tacit contract with Isabella, by the light which streamed forth from within. But that which was unfortunate on one side, was fortunate on another ; for no sooner was the first monosyllable out of Mr. Slattery's mouth, than Isabella darted in and closed the door, so that the surgeon, though he thought the figure strangely like Sir John's daughter, could not swear to the fact.

Beauchamp, at the same time, hastened to prevent his obtaining any more precise knowledge, saying, "Thank you for your information, Mr. Slattery. Hayward is better, and cannot see you to-night, being particularly engaged at present. Good night !" and he also retired into the house, and shut the door.

"Ho, ho !" said Mr. Slattery, "so they do not choose me to see ! Well, let them take the consequences. When people trust me, I can be as silent as the grave ; but if they show a want of confidence, I know how to match them. Did I whisper one word to any one of where the two gentlemen were ? No, not a word !—and now they think to blind me. Well well ! we shall see."

And Mr. Slattery did see, for while this soliloquy had been going on, he had been going on too, and when it came to a conclusion, he came upon the lamps of the large, comfortable barouche of Sir John Slingsby.

"Good evening, Jenkins," said Mr. Slattery, to the tall, fat coachman. "Is Sir John in this part, that you are out so late?"

"No, sir," replied Jenkins, "he's got the charitt over at Meadowfield. I brought my young lady to see Widow Lamb, at Gimlet's, the new keeper's."

"Ho, ho!" said Mr. Slattery, again; but he had not time to make reflections, for at the very moment he heard a pair of human feet running hard, and the next instant a figure shot across the glare of the carriage-lamps. Mr. Slattery had a quick eye, and he instantly called after the runner, "Hie! hie! Captain, I want to speak with you!"

But the person whom he addressed ran on; and as Mr. Slattery did not choose to be so evaded, he struck his plated spurs into his horse's side, and overtook the fugitive at the distance of a quarter of a mile; for, once past the stile where the carriage stood, there was no possible means of getting out of the high-banked lane.

"Hie, Captain!—Captain Moreton!" cried Mr. Slattery, as he came near; and Moreton, not at all liking to have his name shouted all over the country, slackened his pace.

"What the devil do you want, Slattery?" he asked; "do you not see I'm in a hurry?"

"There's my little account, you know, Captain," said Mr. Slattery, "four years standing, and you'd really oblige me very much if——"

"Devil fly away with your account!" said the worthy captain; "do you think I'm going to pay for all the physic you drugged the maid-servants with, at the hall?"

"Have you heard the news, Captain?" exclaimed Mr. Slattery, coming abruptly to the real point, as he perceived the other was going to run again.

"No; what news?" asked Moreton, pausing.

"Why, that Miss Slingsby is going to be married immediately to Mr. Beauchamp, who has been staying down here so long," answered Mr. Slattery; and then added, "as soon as young Wittingham's out of all danger, they say."

"Is she, by——!" exclaimed the captain. "Well, doctor, I shall take the short cut through that gate—good night; and do not say to any one you saw me here. I know you can be trusted with a secret."

"To be sure!" said Mr. Slattery; and while Captain Moreton vaulted over the gate, the surgeon pursued his way towards Tarningham.

« CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIR JOHN SLINGSBY returned to Tarningham Park at about the hour of "dark midnight;" but he found both daughter and niece still up to receive him.

"Well, young ladies," he said, seating himself in his

arm-chair for a moment, and sticking his thumb into his white waistcoat; "you have passed a dull night, I dare say, with the old gentleman out, and the two young gentlemen Lord knows where! Well, how are we to wear away to-morrow?"

"I shall wear away the morning, my dear uncle," said Mary Clifford, who had held long councils with her cousin, "in going to Tarningham; and I will ask you to lend me the carriage for an hour at eight o'clock."

"Certainly, dear Mary," said the baronet; "but Tarningham! what takes your pretty little self to Tarningham?"

"Why, the truth is, I want some money," answered Miss Clifford. "I think the bank opens at half-past eight."

"Money in the bank!" cried Sir John Slingsby; "was there ever such a girl? She has money in the bank! Well, take the carriage, Mary, when you like, and be back to breakfast at half-past nine, otherwise you shall have cold tea, and not a bit of pasty. Now to bed—to bed: for if people have to go to Tarningham early in the morning, they must go to bed at night."

The breakfast-table was laid, as usual, by nine o'clock in the morning; but before that hour Isabella Slingsby had been down, and had wandered about in the drawing-room and in the library, with a nervous sort of unsettledness in her manner, which struck even the servants who happened to pass. She looked out of almost every window in the house which was accessible to her; she gazed down every road that wound through the park; she scanned every moving figure that was within the range of sight; and she felt every moment a terror of what the next would bring, which she had never experienced in life before. She wished that Mary had not left her, that they had sent some one for the money; and she conjured up prospective difficulties and distresses, obstacles that she would not know how to meet, questions of law and form of which she was unaware, to trouble herself and agitate her mind still more. At length, with a bold resolution, she rang the bell, and ordered the servant who appeared to go down to Dr. Miles's, with her compliments, and say she would be glad to see him. The moment after, her father entered the room, as gay, as bustling, as jovial as ever; his face resplendent with small red veins; his eyes sparkling like the wine of the night before; his ample stomach rolling unrepressed under an easy waistcoat; and his stout legs and neat foot carrying him about with the

light step of one-and-twenty. To have looked at him, one would have thought that there was not such a thing as care or sorrow in the world, much less in his own house.

"Ah, Bella!" he cried, kissing her, "how have you slept, my love?—Where's Mary?—not come back? How's your aunt?—pining, pining, eh?—see what comes of a melancholy constitution, too much bile, and twenty years' trial of a puritanical husband! Well, what's o'clock?—five-and-twenty minutes after nine—come along, we'll have breakfast. Mary shall have a fresh pot of tea when she comes;" and in went Sir John Slingsby to the breakfast-room, ringing the bell as if he would have pulled it down the moment he got in.

"Breakfast!" he exclaimed, when the butler appeared. "Has not the post-bag come?"

"No, Sir John" replied the man.

"Very late," said the baronet; and, marching to the window, he looked out upon the sunshiny park, with his hands behind him, for want of better occupation.

To poor Isabella Slingsby, her father's lively unconscientiousness was terrible; and it was with trembling hands that she made the tea and poured out the coffee, giving a sharp look round every time the door opened, as if in expectation of some grim bailiff's face appearing. Such, indeed, would have been the case, had it not been that good Mr. Bacon had contrived to delay what he could not prevent; and at length, much to the joy and satisfaction of Isabella, the grating sound of carriage-wheels was heard from the park. That sound was still distant and indistinct, however, when the butler came in with a very peculiar and significant expression of countenance, saying, "Please, Sir John, there's a man wants to speak with you."

"Well, he must wait," said Sir John Slingsby. "Tell him I am at breakfast—has not the post-bag come yet?"

"Please, Sir John, the man says he must speak with you directly."

"Tell him to go to the devil," said Sir John Slingsby, "and speak with him;" but the words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the door opened behind the butler, and not one man, but two, appeared.

Isabella's face had been very pale from the first announcement made by the servant; but Sir John had remained perfectly unconscious till he saw those two strange faces. They were anything but pleasant faces in the abstract, for, though well washed and shaved, there was a ruffianly dirt of expression, which no

soap could get rid of. There are certain professions which stamp themselves upon the outer man in indelible lines. The bailiff—the man who makes his bread or his fortune by inflicting the most poignant misery the law knows upon his fellow-creatures—the step in society still lower than the hangman—is never to be mistaken; and Sir John Slingsby recognised at once the errand of his intrusive visitors in their aspect. His face became very pale, the red veins turned blue; and he sat at the table without uttering a word. He well knew that these men's appearance, though bad enough in itself, was but the commencement of evils; that the long-delayed hour was come; that the thin worn line which upheld his whole fortunes had snapped, and that he was now to fall into the gulf of ruin which had so long yawned beneath him. Arrested and carried from his house, every creditor would pour in with his claims, every debt be swelled by law expenses, till nought would be left for him and for his child but a prison and a life of labour.

His careless heart sank with the weight suddenly cast upon it; and his brain was overpowered with the multitude of thoughts it had resisted too long.

But Isabella stepped in like an angel of comfort; her heart rose as his fell. The moment of terror passed away; and, as the foremost of the two men laid his hand lightly upon Sir John's shoulder, she whispered in his ear, "Do not alarm yourself, my dear father. Mary has gone to Tarningham for the money. We heard of all this last night, and are quite prepared. She will be here in a moment—I hear the carriage coming up now."

"At whose suit, and for what amount?" demanded Sir John Slingsby, turning to the bailiff. He could say no more, for some moments were required to collect his thoughts.

"At Mr. Wittingham's, Sir John," replied the man, "for five thousand three hundred and forty-two pounds seven and fourpence."

"Then you may tell Mr. Wittingham for me," said Sir John Slingsby, "that he is a d—d shabby, sneaking scoundrel, to do such a thing as this without giving me some notice."

"Come, come, Sir John," rejoined the bailiff, "you know it is no use talking—you must come along, you know."

"You are somewhat too quick, sir," said Isabella, interposing; "if you mean to say the debt must be paid, that is very well. It shall be paid."

"Ay, miss; but it must be paid immediately, or Sir John must march," answered the man, screwing his eye at his follower; "gammon is gammon, you know."

"I do not understand what you mean," said Isabella, haughtily.—"Pray, papa, do not touch him" (for Sir John had risen, with fury in his countenance)—"the debt shall be paid immediately, as you say."

"And you shall be ducked in the horse-pond for your insolence," added the baronet,—continuing to the butler, "Call in all the men!"

"Nay, nay—do not, my dear father!" cried Isabella. "Five thousand three hundred and forty pounds, you said?" she continued, addressing the bailiff,—"*I will bring the money this moment.*"

"Forty-two, seven, and four," said the man, sullenly; "but there may be detainers, and as the captain is made, I fancy I cannot——"

"Oh, I'll soon settle that!" said Sir John Slingsby. "You see, my good fellow, there are several windows to this room, as well as doors—I do not resist the law—wouldn't resist the law for the world!—but as soon as the money is paid, you go out of either windows or doors, as you please; but speedily, in either case. Get the money, Bella—call the men here!" he added, speaking sharply to the butler; "I see we shall want them."

Isabella hastened out of the room, for the carriage had just drawn up; and as she entered the vestibule, she saw Mary stepping lightly out of it, with a calm smile. "Have you got it?" cried Isabella, in eager haste; "they are here already."

"Indeed!" said Mary, sadly; "I am sorry for that. But there was some difficulty; for at the bank, as the sum was so large, they wanted proof of Captain Hayward's signature, which they did not well know. I could not tell what to do, and therefore went to Mr. Bacon's, who soon settled the matter."

"Why, the writ was taken out by him," cried Isabella.

"Yes, I know," answered her cousin; "but he told me how sorry he was to be forced by Mr. Wittingham to do it; and explained that it would be much better to pay the money at once in Tarningham, when he would give me a receipt in full, and an order, or something, to these men, so as to stop anything unpleasant at once—for he thought I should get back before they arrived. He said there would be a great object gained in paying the money once, so that the receipt might be dated before what he called the caption."

"And did you do it?" asked Isabella, cagerly—"did you do it, dearest Mary?"

"Yes!" answered her cousin, half alarmed. "I really believe he is a very honest little man; and he seemed truly distressed at Mr. Wittingham's conduct. He gave me the receipt, and the order, too; and took great pains to date them half-past eight, though it was nearly nine. I hope I have not done wrong, Isabella?"

"Oh dear, no! I dare say it is all quite right," cried Isabella, joyfully. "Give them to me, Mary, and let me run back; for I am afraid of what my father calls 'an affair of posts,' between him and these bailiffs. I left him marvellously pugnacious."

Mary Clifford put into her hand the two papers which she had received in Tarningham, and at the same time drew forth a small bundle of bank-notes, saying, "There is the rest of the twelve thousand pounds—for Heaven's sake, take care of it, Isabella!"

Her cousin gazed at the little packet with a gay smile; and then tossing her head, with the joy of a light heart relieved from a heavy load, she ran back into the breakfast-room, while Mary went up stairs, to lay aside her shawl and bonnet.

At the door of the room where she had left her father, Isabella resumed a calm and composed air; and, entering with a stately step, found five or six men-servants arranged across the end of the chamber, while the two bailiffs stood looking somewhat crest-fallen and apprehensive near Sir John, who, for his part, sat beating a tune on the breakfast-table with his fingers, and endeavouring to appear unconcerned. A sharp, anxious glance at his daughter's face, however, told that all fear was not at an end; but her confident look reassured him, and he exclaimed, "Well, Bella, have you brought the money?"

"Yes," replied Miss Slingsby, and, approaching the table, she laid down the roll of bank-notes, spread them out, and began to count—"One thousand, two thousand, three, four, five, six thousand;" she said aloud, much to the astonishment and admiration of the servants.

"That is more than enough, madam," said the bailiff, approaching with humbled air and smooth tone.

"I know it is," replied Isabella: "be so good as to keep your hands away, sir; for you are not going to have one penny of that sum. I was only counting to see that the amount was right. That paper, I think, will be quite enough for you; and that, my dear father, is the receipt for the whole sum and costs to Mr. Wittingham."

"Well, ma'am, well, I've nothing to say," exclaimed the bailiff; "it is all in order. Howsomever, I have only done my duty; and am very glad the matter is so settled."

"Done your duty, you vagabond!" cried Sir John Slingsby, "done only your duty, when you ventured to use the word 'gazzmon' to my daughter—but it does not matter—it does not matter! Get out of my sight as fast as possible, and tell that fellow Wittingham to keep far off me, for, as sure as I am alive, I will horsewhip him the first time I see him—take care of them, my men, and see them safe off the grounds."

The words certainly did not imply any very formidable menace; but as such the bailiff and his follower seemed to understand them, and made speed towards the door, while the men-servants answered "That we will, Sir John;" but made way for the two unwelcome visitors to effect their exit easily. Isabella remonstrated earnestly with her father; but the jovial baronet only exclaimed, "P'oo! nonsense, Bella; no harm can happen, I must see what goes on; for, with a fair start and a good run, it would be capital fun. Come into the library—come into the library, we shall have the best view there; and after that we will breakfast."

Isabella Slingsby, however, remained alone in the breakfast-room, gazing down upon the notes spread out on the table. The eagerness, the excitement of the moment was gone. The anxious fear for her father's liberty was over. Something smote her heart—even the little display of the money before the eyes of the servants and the bailiffs she was sorry for. Considerations presented themselves which she had never thought of before; and when her cousin Mary entered the room a few minutes after, Isabella cast her arm round her neck, and, bending her head upon her shoulder, said, with a blush on her cheek and tears in her eyes, "Poor Ned Hayward, Mary, I have thought too little of him; and he is not rich, I know."

"Do not be afraid, Isabella," said Mary, in a low tone.

"But I am afraid, Mary," rejoined Isabella. "I know my father is terribly embarrassed—I fear he will never be able to repay this sum."

"Then I will," said Mary Clifford.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WE must go back to Stephen Gimlet's cottage and the preceding night. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward stood

together by the table, when their two fair visitors had left them, waiting for the return of the gamekeeper, and they both remained silent for several minutes.

Both Beauchamp and Hayward had done an important thing that night. The latter had stripped himself for a friend's benefit of the treasured resource of after-life. Never rich, he had left himself but a scanty pittance which was not likely to be increased by any means but his own personal exertions. From that moment, he felt that his course of life must be changed; that his views, his feelings, his habits, must undergo a severe scrutiny, and be subjected to a hard discipline; that the careless ease, the light-hearted indifference to the morrow was at an end; that the small cares he had never yet known, the looking to shillings and to pence, and all the sordid minutiae of difficult economy, were to be his companions for life, as inseparable from his footsteps as his shadow.

But Ned Hayward was a very honest man, and his first thought was how to bear his poverty rightly. He gave not one thought to the money he had just given away—for so he believed it to be—he would have performed the same act over and over again a dozen times if he had had the means and the motives to do so; and would each time have done it willingly; but that did not prevent his feeling the painful situation in which he had left himself; and he contemplated with deep thought and stern resolution all that was to issue from the deed he had done.

With Beauchamp, the feelings might be different, but the sources from which they sprang were the same. He, too, had taken a step which was to influence the whole of his future life. He had said words to Isabella Slingsby, of which he felt all the import at the moment they were spoken—which he spoke purposely, that there might be no doubt or hesitation on her mind in regard to his sensations or purposes, and yet which, as soon as they were uttered, filled him with a vague feeling of apprehension. Yet Beauchamp was a resolute man in character, and had performed acts of persisting resolution which few men would have had the determination to carry through. He loved Isabella, too, dearly; and, had the whole world been subject to his choice, he would have selected her. He was anxious, likewise, to call her his own; for he was not without the fire of passion, and was very different from those idle triflers, in whom love is a vanity lighted up by the cold ignis fatuus of a volatile and fugitive desire. But his previous history furnished materials for doubt and alarm; and when he paused to contemplate all the innu-

merable consequences of the few words he had spoken, there was a mist over one part of that sea of many waves, the future,—and he asked himself, with awe, “What is beneath?” The thought, however, that he was loved in return, was consolation and courage; and though, for his part, Ned Hayward did not venture to indulge in any such sweet dream, yet the image of Mary Clifford, like that of the Virgin in the old legend, shed a light which dispelled the darkness along one bright path, through the obscure future, for him also.

The contemplations of both gentlemen, however, were speedily broken through by the return of Ste Gimlet, who, turning to Mr. Beauchamp, inquired,—

“Please, sir, what shall we do with the man locked up in the vestry?”

“Oh, have him out!” cried Ned Hayward, “and hand him over to a constable.”

Beauchamp did not reply so quickly; but at length, he said,—

“There may be difficulty, Hayward, in finding a constable at this time of night; and not only difficulty, but also danger to ourselves, if we take any part in the business. Is the place where the man is confined secure?” he continued, addressing the gamekeeper.

“Pretty well, sir, I think,” answered Gimlet; “there are bars to the windows, and the door is locked tight enough. Then we can lock the church door, too.”

“I locked it, Stephen,” said Mrs. Lamb; “there hangs the key.”

“Then let him stay there the night,” rejoined Beauchamp; “I will not interfere to screen him; and Gimlet can get a constable early to-morrow morning, without our taking any part in the affair.”

This proposal was agreed to by Ned Hayward, though the expression which his friend used, in regard to screening the offender, struck him as somewhat strange. It is wonderful, however, how often in life we do what is vulgarly termed, reckon without our host. The two gentlemen retired to rest in the rooms above, which had been prepared and furnished for them in haste, since the duel with young Wittingham; and Stephen Gimlet and Widow Lamb also sought repose. Early the next morning, however, the gamekeeper rose to seek a constable; but first he thought it expedient to look at the temporary prison in which he had confined Captain Moreton. The doors, both of church and vestry, were still closed and locked; but, passing round towards his own cottage again, by a little

grass-grown path that ran under the church walls, Ste Gimlet was surprised and confounded to perceive that three of the bars covering the window of the vestry had been forced out of the mortar in which they had been socketed; and jumping up on a tombstone to look in, he soon saw that the bird had taken wing from its cage.

Stephen Gimlet, notwithstanding this discovery, did not return to his cottage at once, to communicate the intelligence to those within. He paused and thought; but, to say truth, it was not of the event which he had just ascertained that he meditated. That was done and over: the man was gone, and might never be caught again; but the words which Beauchamp had spoken the night before had made a deeper impression upon his mind than they had upon Ned Hayward's, and naturally, for the young officer had never remarked or heard anything before which could lead his fancy to perceive any connection between his friend and Captain Moreton. Stephen Gimlet, on the contrary, had observed much that excited his imagination, and it was one of a very active character. He remembered the interest which Beauchamp had displayed in the monuments of the Moreton family; he remembered all the inquiries he had made regarding their former property; and he did not forget either his mother-in-law's ancient connection with one of the members of that house, or the somewhat mysterious expressions she had used in regard to Beauchamp himself. It was a tangled skein, difficult to unravel, but yet he resolved to unravel it; not exactly from curiosity, though curiosity might have some share therein, but rather because, in his wild fancy, he dreamed that the knowledge which Goody Lamb possessed of his guest's previous history might afford him some means of serving a man he looked upon as his benefactor. He was peculiarly susceptible of kindness or unkindness, of gratitude or its reverse, resentment; and he thought that it would be a happy day for him, if he could ever return to Mr. Beauchamp, even in a small degree, the kindness he had received. He pondered upon these things for full five minutes, and then returned to his cottage, where he found the old lady, in the inner room, making the little boy repeat a short prayer at his bedside, after having washed and dressed him. It was a sweet and wholesome sight to the father. He contrasted it with former days, and he felt the balmy influence of honest peace pour over his heart. One of the first rewards of a return to virtue from any of man's many deviations, is an appreciation of its excellence. He stood and gazed, and listened well

satisfied, while the words of holy prayer rose up from the sweet tongue of his own child; and if the boy had prayed for his father's confirmation in his return to right, the petition could not have been more fully granted.

When it was done, Ste Gimlet kissed the child, and sent him out to play in the little garden. Then, shaking hands with Widow Lamb, he said,—

"I wanted to ask you a question or two, Goody. Do you know who the man is that rushed into the vestry last night?"

"To be sure I do," answered the widow; "do you think, Stephen, I could forget one I have seen in such times, and known in such acts as that man? No, no; I shall remember him to my dying day."

"Well, then," replied her son-in-law, "I want you to tell me, Goody, what there is between him and Mr. Beauchamp; for the man has got out and is off, and I have great doubts that he is Mr. Beauchamp's friend."

"I had better hold my tongue, Stephen," said the old woman—"I had better hold my tongue, at least till I see and understand more. One thing at least I may say, and say truly, that the bitterest enemy ever Mr. Beauchamp had, was that Captain Moreton."

"Do you think, Widow Lamb," asked the gamekeeper, in a low, stern tone, "that he has any cause to wish Mr. Beauchamp dead?"

The old woman started, and gazed at him, demanding,—
"What makes you ask that?"

"I'll tell you, widow," replied the man. "Have you not heard of a shot fired into Sir John Slingsby's dining-room? Well, that shot went within a few inches of Mr. Beauchamp's head, and that is the man who fired it."

The old woman sank down on the stool by the bedside, and clasped her hands together, exclaiming,—

"Is it come to that! Ay, I thought it would, sooner or later. He could not stop—no, no, he could not stop!"

She paused for a moment, and rocked herself backwards and forwards upon the seat, with a pained and bewildered look.

"I see how it is, Goody," said Gimlet; "and now I'll tell you. That fellow shan't get off. I'll never give it up till I've caught him. I'll track him, like a hare, to his form, and he shall be punished. Mr. Beauchamp has been kind to me—one of the first that ever were; and I'll not forget kindness, though I'll try to forget unkindness."

"Take care what you are about, Stephen," answered his mother-in-law, "or you may do harm instead of good."

Watch him, if you will, to prevent mischief; and, above all, let me know everything that you see and hear. I will talk with Mr. Beauchamp, as you call him, this very day. I wonder if the woman is living!"

"There was one woman with this man, at all events," answered Stephen Gimlet, "when he was down here last."

"Ah! what was she like?" inquired Widow Lamb, eagerly—"what was she like?"

"I only saw her for a minute," replied the gamekeeper; "but she seemed a fine handsome lady as one could wish to see—somewhat reddish in the face; but with fine, dark eyes, and mighty gaily dressed. She was tall, too, for a woman."

"Yes, her eyes were dark enough," said Widow Lamb; and she was always fond of fine clothes—that was her ruin; but red in the face!—that is strange; she had the finest and the fairest skin I ever saw."

"Well, the redness might come from drink," said Stephen Gimlet; "for she seemed to me half-drunk then. He called her Charlotte, I recollect."

"Ay, that's her name," exclaimed the widow; "and so they have come together again? It is for no good, I will answer; for two bolder or worse spirits never met to plot mischief."

"You had better tell me all about it, Goody," said Stephen Gimlet; "do something to that fellow, I will, and it's bad to work in the dark."

"Not till I have spoken to the gentleman upstairs," said the old woman. "Watch the man, Stephen: find out where he is—what he is doing—all about him, and about her, too; but do not meddle with him yet. Hark! they are coming down. You go away, and I will talk with him this very day."

"I must tell them he has got out, before I go," answered the gamekeeper, going into the other room, and bolting the outer door, to guard against intrusion while the two lodgers were below.

No one, however, appeared but Beauchamp, whose first words were—

"I wish, Stephen, you would send some one down to Tarningham, to tell Mr. Slattery to come up. Captain Hayward is not so well this morning, and says he has not slept all night."

"I will go myself, sir," said Gimlet; "but I just wanted to tell you that Captain Moreton has got out, during the night. He has wrenched out three of the bars of the window, and is off."

Beauchamp mused.

"Well, it does not much matter," he said, at length ; "but you had better inform Doctor Miles of what you saw in the church, and let him take whatever steps he may think necessary to insure that no fraud has been committed. I can have nothing to do with the affair. Bring up Mr. Slattery as soon as you can, for I am somewhat anxious about Captain Hayward's state this morning."

Gimlet did not reply. He uttered no expression of sorrow or of sympathy ; but yet he felt as much grieved and alarmed as if Ned Hayward had been his brother ; and his countenance showed it, though his words did not.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Beauchamp was turning to go upstairs again ; but Widow Lamb came out of the inner room, and stopped him, saying—

"I wish to speak a word or two to you, sir."

"Well, my good lady," answered Beauchamp, with a smile, "can I do anything to serve you?"

"No, sir," replied the old woman, "it is not that. But I see you do not recollect me—and, indeed, how should you ! It is a long time since we first met."

Beauchamp gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then said—

"I think I do remember having seen you somewhere before I met you here. Your face struck me as familiar to my recollection when first I saw you ; but I cannot remember where I saw it. Were you ever in India?"

"Oh ! no, my lord, it was not there," answered Widow Lamb ; "when first I saw you, you were quite a young gentleman ; the Honourable Charles St. Leger, they called you ; and you had come down with Captain Moreton, your cousin, to shoot on the grounds of his great aunt, Miss Moreton."

Beauchamp's face turned somewhat pale, and his fine broad brow contracted ; but he did not speak, and the old woman continued—

"Do you not recollect, my lord, Davie Lamb, the grieve, as they called him, and your coming down with a gay party to the grieve's house, one day ? It was the eleventh of August, twelve years ago this summer ; and the lady was with you, Miss Charlotte Hay, as they called her——"

"Hush ! hush !" cried Beauchamp, almost fiercely ; "do not mention her name in my hearing. You do not know—you do not know, good woman——"

"Oh, yes, my lord, I do," answered Widow Lamb ; "I know more than you think—more than you know, perhaps, yourself. I can tell you many things about her."

"Tell me nothing," said Beauchamp, sternly; "you can say nothing of her conduct, infamous and bad, that I do not know or do not guess. I wish never to hear her name again;" and he turned once more towards the stairs.

"Well, I beg your pardon, my lord," said Widow Lamb, with a disappointed look, "I did not mean to vex you, but if ever you should wish to hear more, I can tell you better than any one; for there is nobody now living knows so much as I do, and I think——"

The conclusion of her sentence was wanting, for some one opened the cottage door, which had not been bolted since Stephen Gimlet had gone out. The next moment the head of Mr. Slattery appeared, and, entering with an insinuating smile, the worthy surgeon saluted Beauchamp reverentially, saying,—

"I met my good friend Wolf, Mr. Beauchamp, and was sorry to hear that Captain Hayward is not so well. But I have got good news for him, and you too. No more need of playing at bo-peep. I found Mr. Wittingham so much better this morning, that I have ventured publicly to pronounce him out of danger."

"Thank God for that!" said Beauchamp; "but we had better go up and see Hayward, who seems to me somewhat feverish."

"I am afraid there is a bit of the wadding, or the coat, or something still in the wound," said Mr. Slattery, following Beauchamp upstairs, "but there is no cause for alarm. It may produce inconvenience and some inflammation; but nature, my dear sir, by the very same process which produces pain and irritation to the patient, often expels any extraneous substance, which, if it remained, might cause more serious results."

Mr. Slattery remained at least an hour and a half; and, to say the truth, during that time he put our good friend Ned Hayward to some torture, but in the end, he succeeded in extracting from the wound which that gentleman had received a portion of his waistcoat, which had been carried in by the ball in its passage. Some hemorrhage followed, which was stopped with difficulty; but at length the surgeon took his leave, and descended with Beauchamp to the lower room.

Widow Lamb, however, met them at the foot of the stairs, saying, in a low tone—

"There is a servant on horseback, from the Park, ~~and~~ just now before the door. He has got a note, which he will give to no one but you; and I did not know what to do."

"There is no necessity for any further concealment," said Beauchamp, advancing to the door; "you have got a note for me," he continued, speaking to the servant, who touched his hat, and delivered a small billet.

Beauchamp tore it open, and read while good Mr. Slattery paused beside him, in the hope of hearing some news; for, as we have shown, he was not without a laudable portion of curiosity.

"I must go over directly," said Beauchamp, for that note placed before his eyes a very unpleasant state of affairs at Tarningham Park—a mortgage foreclosed, an execution placed in the house, and Sir John Slingsby himself arrested on a heavy bond debt, for long arrears of interest, and interest upon interest, and lawyers' costs. Isabella wrote in a tone of despair; and yet there was something shining through all her gloomy words—a confidence in him to whom those words were written which was very pleasing to him.

"Can I drive you over in my gig, Mr. Beauchamp?" said Mr. Slattery.

"No, I thank you," replied the other; "I dare say, my good fellow, you will not object to let me mount your horse?" he continued, addressing the servant. "I must get over to the Park, as speedily as possible."

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL was dismay and confusion in the house of Sir John Slingsby, when, after having galloped straight across the country, without heeding bridle-paths or carriage-roads, Beauchamp drew his rein at the door. No servant came to take the horse, for all were busy within, though, busy with what, would have been difficult to say. The only thing they had to be busy with was their own consternation; for there was no packing up for departure, no inventories, no arrangements in progress; and yet not an attendant appeared, except through the double glass doors, where a knot was to be seen assembled in the inner vestibule, who never turned a look towards the terrace before the house. One excuse, perhaps, might be that there were so many people arriving, that a new-comer could attract no attention. It seemed as if a general call had been made upon Tarningham, to attend and witness the disgrace and discomfort of the family. A number of tradesmen were gathered before the doors conversing together in low

tones, and with gloomy faces; and there was a post-chaise, besides a gig, a saddle-horse, and a tax-cart or two. Beauchamp thought the spectacle somewhat odd; for it seemed to him, notwithstanding all he knew of the gossiping propensities of small places, that the news of Sir John Slingsby's misfortunes must have spread with marvellous rapidity. But he knew not Mr. Wharton, nor could conceive the policy which should induce a man, who had chosen his moment for consummating a long-prepared scheme for stripping another of all his worldly wealth, to complicate his difficulties by every means, so as to render the bonds he had cast round him indissoluble.

"Here, take my horse," he said, addressing the sullen-looking postilion who stood behind the chaise; and when the man obeyed, civilly enough, Beauchamp approached a hale-looking man, like a grazier, and inquired, "What is all this?"

"Why, sir," replied the man, who had often seen his interrogator in Tarningham, "Mr. Wharton's clerk told me that there was an execution going to be put in, so I came up to see if I could get my bill. But the lawyer was beforehand with us; and the matter is not so much—only forty pound or so—and I did not think it worth while, when I found how matters are going, to trouble the hearty old gentleman, who has spent a deal o' money with us all in his day."

"You seem a very respectable man," said Beauchamp, calmly, but still somewhat moved, "and you shall not lose by your conduct. You, sir," and he turned to another, "I think you are the stationer at Tarningham—is yours the same errand, and on the same information?"

"Yes, sir," answered the person he addressed, "one of Mr. Wharton's young men came down and told me; but I think with my neighbour Groves, that we should behave handsome."

"I see the whole matter," said Beauchamp, speaking rather to himself than those around. "You can wait a little, gentlemen? I think Sir John can pay you all without inconvenience, though he is a careless man, and his affairs may not be quite in order."

"They say Mr. Wharton has arrested him, sir," said a little man, with a thin, small voice.

"I will go in and see," replied Beauchamp with a smile. "If any of you could contrive to go or send down to Tarningham, and say to Mr. Bacon, the attorney, that Lord Lenham would be glad to see him here immediately, you would oblige me. Tell him to lose not a moment."

"I'll go in a jiffey," cried the stout man, jumping into a tax-cart. "Who did you say, my lord?"

"Lord Lenham," answered Beauchamp; "he will know who you mean;" and turning round he walked into the house.

The servants grouped themselves differently at his appearance, and bowed low, the butler venturing to say,

"I'm glad you have come, sir."

"Where is your master?" asked Beauchamp.

"In the library, sir," replied the man, "with a number of them. It is a sad time, sir, 'specially for my poor young lady."

The man walked on before, and opened the library door; Beauchamp followed quickly; and certainly the sight which that room presented was a painful one. Mrs. Clifford sat near one of the windows, the picture of despair; Isabella was seated at the table, with her eyes buried in her hands, and the rich curls of her beautiful hair falling over her face. Mary was bending down to speak to her; grief in her lovely face, but yet as calm and composed as usual. Old Sir John was a little in advance, with two bailiffs standing near—not the same who had been there earlier in the morning—and his valet appeared behind him, helping him to put on his great coat, while Mr. Wharton stood at the other side of the large library-table, with a smile upon his lip, a frown upon his brow, a sparkling black eye, and a double degree of red in one of the cheeks, though the other looked somewhat pale. Two or three men, whose business there and ordinary functions were not apparent at the moment, made up the rest of the company.

Sir John Slingsby had one arm in the sleeve of his great coat, and was thrusting angrily and ineffectually at the garment, to get the other in also, speaking all the time in a furious tone, with his face turned to Mr. Wharton.

"I tell you, Wharton, you are a d—d scoundrel," he said—"an ungentlemanlike blackguard. You have swindled me out of thousands, and you know it; and now, without giving me a hint, you come upon me in this way."

"You are angry, Sir John—you are angry," said Mr. Wharton, in a sweet tone. "It is as unpleasant to me as to you, I can assure you; but when I heard that Mr. Wittingham had issued process, I was compelled, however unwillingly, to take care of myself and my clients. You know I told you a month ago it could not go on any longer; so you cannot say you had no notice."

The old baronet was about to pour upon him a new volley of objurgations, thrusting manfully at the sleeve

of his coat all the time, when suddenly his eye rested upon Beauchamp, and he stopped, turning a little pale, for the presence of that gentleman at such a moment both surprised and pained him. Mary whispered a word to her cousin, however, and Isabella, starting up with tears in her eyes, and a glow upon her cheeks, held out her hand to him, exclaiming, "Oh, thank you—thank you! Dr. Miles was not to be found," she added, in a whisper, "or I would not have sent."

Beauchamp smiled and shook his head half reproachfully; and Sir John, recovering himself, took his hand, saying, "Ah, Beauchamp, you have come at an awkward time. Can't ask you to dinner to-day, my dear sir, for the house is in the hands of the myrmidons of the law, and I must away, they tell me. It is a bad job, I am afraid."

"Nevertheless I intend to dine with you here, Sir John," answered Beauchamp, laughing, and shaking the baronet's hand warmly, "so you had better take off your great coat."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Wharton, taking a step forward, "but I am afraid Sir John Slingsby cannot remain with you at present. Business has been too long delayed already by the folly of the officer who thought fit——"

"To act like a man of some consideration and feeling, I suppose, sir," said Beauchamp, eyeing the attorney from head to foot with a calm, cold, withering look. "You are Mr. Wharton the attorney, I imagine, of whom I have heard so much in regard to several transactions soon to be inquired into?"

"My name is Wharton, sir; yes, my name is Wharton," answered the solicitor, in a sharp fierce tone, "and I insist that you do not interrupt the operation of the law."

"The operation of the law I shall not interrupt," replied Beauchamp, "but the operations of the lawyer I certainly shall."

"He's a nabob," said Sir John Slingsby to his niece, in a low laughing voice; "yes, you are quite right, Beauchamp, this is Mr. Wharton, the attorney, calling himself esquire, and a greater scoundrel does not live between the four seas. He has cheated me through thick and thin, and now wants, by coming upon me all in a moment, to get possession of my property, as he has done with others before now."

"If such are his intentions, he will find himself mistaken," answered Beauchamp; "but now, Sir John, take off your coat again, and we will to business. I think the ladies may as well leave us, however. Be satisfied, my dear madam," he continued, speaking to Mrs. Clifford, who had risen and

come a little forward; "be satisfied, Miss Slingsby—all this matter will be easily arranged, and Sir John and I will join you in the drawing-room in an hour."

While Beauchamp had been speaking these few words, Mr. Wharton had been conversing with rapid utterance, but in a low voice, with one of the men present, who seemed to be the superior sheriff's officer, and as soon as the gentleman ceased, he exclaimed, "Well, sir, as you think the whole matter can be so easily arranged, I shall leave you to arrange it."

"Excuse me," Mr. Wharton, said Beauchamp, coolly, "you will be good enough to stay. We shall want you for certain receipts, and perhaps," he added with a smile, "for some good legal advice till my own solicitor comes, whom I expect in about half an hour."

"My receipts can be soon given," said Mr. Wharton, a good deal staggered and alarmed by Mr. Beauchamp's calm tone, and his allusion to his solicitor; "but I can tell you, that if you think that is all you will have to do, you are mistaken. The house is filled with creditors."

"Gathered together by Mr. Wharton, the attorney, for the purpose of overwhelming a gentleman whom he sought to ruin," answered Beauchamp. "I am aware of all that, sir. Your proceedings have been watched, and I am informed of almost every step you have taken for the last month. I dare say, however, we shall find means of satisfying all who have any just claim."

Isabella had lingered at the door after her aunt and cousin had passed out, and now, hastily turning back, she placed a little packet she had held tightly in her hand in that of Beauchamp, saying in a low voice, "Here is more than six thousand pounds left from what kind, good Ned Hayward gave last night. The other debts are not large, but this man's claim is frightful."

She spoke in a tone of alarm, but Beauchamp hastened to relieve her, replying, "Never fear. The claims must be investigated, but all that is just shall be paid. Leave us, and make your mind easy, dear Miss Slingsby."

"I really cannot waste my time here," said Mr. Wharton, as the young lady left the room; "I have important business to attend to, and the magistrates to meet at eleven, Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name, sir, is Henry Beauchamp St. Leger, Viscount Lenham," answered Beauchamp, "and I am afraid the magistrates must dispense with your company to-day, Mr. Wharton. You cannot carry this business through, sir, in the same manner that you did that of my poor uncle,

Mr. St. Leger Moreton. So now make up your mind at once, sir, to remain here till the whole of this unpleasant business which you have stirred up against Sir John Slingsby be brought to a conclusion, for, depend upon it, I will not let you go till such is the case."

Mr. Wharton's face had turned paler and paler, till the carbuncles, of which he did not possess a few, remained alone in their glory; but he was an irritable and fiery man, up to a certain point, and he replied, in a bold tone, "Oh ho, my lord! Do you think because you happen to be a peer, who has been skulking about the country under an alias, that you can come down and brow-beat us country gentlemen at your pleasure?"

"I never attempt to brow-beat a gentleman at all," replied Beauchamp, laying a particular emphasis on the last word, which called up a very unpleasant grin upon the faces of two or three of the men present, "nor do I brow-beat you, Mr. Wharton; but I simply insist upon your staying till the business which brought you here is concluded. You have no right to put Sir John Slingsby in an unpleasant position, and then leave him there when your presence is wanted to relieve him from it."

"He has a ducking in the horse-pond, too, to go through," cried Sir John Slingsby, "such as we gave the other bailiff he sent up this morning. He must wait—he must wait for all the honours;" and turning round with a laugh, the worthy baronet whispered a word or two to his valet, who remained in the room.

"I will take care, Sir John," said the man, and moved towards the door; but Beauchamp interposed, saying,—

"No, no, we must have no violence. Only order the servants not to let this man pass out till I have done with him. And now, to business. Sir John, if you will take the end of the table, I will sit here. Mr. Wharton will place himself there, and the matter will soon be arranged. Ring that bell, sir."

The bailiff to whom he spoke, obeyed in an instant; Sir John Slingsby took a chair at the head of the table, and Mr. Wharton seeing no help for it, seated himself where Beauchamp pointed, turning his face to the window with an indifferent air, as if the business about to take place was no concern of his.

"Now, sir, what is it you want here?" asked Beauchamp, addressing one of the officers.

"I hold a writ against Sir John Slingsby, for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds," said the man, "at the suit of Joseph Wharton, Esq."

"Well, sir, stand back," said Beauchamp; "we will deal with you presently. And you, sir?" he continued, speaking to another stout, broad-set, black-faced man.

This proved to be an officer put in execution upon a second bond for a sum of seven thousand pounds, at the suit of the same person. He also was directed to stand back, Beauchamp saying, "Upon these actions we will give bail, as they must be tried. You, sir, there at the end of the table, what do you want?"

"Why, please you, my lord, it's only my bill for a hundred and seventeen pounds, or thereabouts, for repairs to the stables and offices. If it had not been Mr. Wharton told me I should not get my money if I did not apply at once, I should never have thought of troubling Sir John."

Beauchamp's eye fixed sternly upon the attorney, who exclaimed, with a quivering lip, "Did you not consult me, sir?" Was I not bound to give you a just opinion?"

"I never said a word to nobody," replied the man, "till I met you in the street, and you told me Mr. Wittingham was going to arrest Sir John."

"Really, my lord, this is trifling," said Mr. Wharton. "I ask, is Sir John Slingsby ready to discharge his heavy debt to me? If he is, let him do it, and I go. If not, he must, I fear, go to prison."

"He is quite ready, sir, to discharge every just debt this instant," replied Beauchamp, "but we doubt that yours is just, sir, and therefore we will deal first with those that are certainly honest. Sir John," he continued, pointing to a servant who had come in, "will you order Dr. Miles to be sent for. Now, my good man, you shall have a cheque for your money;" and taking out his cheque-book, he wrote an order for the amount, taking the builder's name and statement from his own lips.

Another man was then called forward, and the same course pursued, Beauchamp proceeding quietly, although he saw Mr. Wharton rise, and enter into eager consultation with the bailiffs.

He was not allowed to go on long without interruption, for after what seemed some urgent remonstrances on the part of Mr. Wharton, and a good deal of resistance on the part of the sheriff's officer, the latter stepped forward, saying, "I really, my lord, cannot wait any longer, and I do not see any good of it; for Sir John being in my custody, and not knowing what detainers may be lodged against him, a bail bond cannot be drawn till we see."

The man spoke civilly, and with an evident respect for Beauchamp, and Beauchamp answered calmly, "Your observa-

tion is a very just one, my good friend. I have only to answer, however, that I am ready to give bail to any amount which you may think necessary to secure the sheriff, in which Dr. Miles will join me I am sure, as soon as he arrives."

"It is a heavy sum, sir," said the bailiff, doubtfully.

"True," answered Beauchamp, "and, moreover, you do not know, except from my own word, who I am, nor that I am in a position to give an available bond. It is for that very reason, that I wish you to delay till my solicitor and Dr. Miles arrive, when I assure you, upon my word of honour, that you shall have every satisfaction. The sum required would be more than met by money of mine in the Tarningham bank, as you will see by that receipt, if I thought fit to pay the whole debt claimed by Mr. Wharton at once, which I do not. The bond on which the writ has been taken out is, you tell me, for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds. Here you see, are sixty-five thousand pounds paid on my account into the Tarningham bank."

"But there is another bond for seven thousand five hundred pounds, on which execution has issued," said Mr. Wharton.

"Exactly so," said Beauchamp, whose thoughts were very rapid, "and the way I intend to deal with that matter is as follows: We will pay the amount of that bond under protest, as a matter of account, reserving this other claim for twenty-three thousand pounds to try the questions that may arise, such as consideration, usury, &c."

Mr. Wharton bit his lip. He saw that he had made one mistake. He feared that he might have made more; for knowing that Sir John Slingsby had little acquaintance with law, and an invincible objection to lawyers, excepting when he wanted to borrow money, he had gone on with somewhat rash confidence in his own powers of over-reaching. However, he put a bold face upon the matter, saying, "That won't do, sir—that won't do, my lord. You seem to have a smattering of the law, but you will find that all accounts have been examined and passed. No court in Christendom will open that question again."

"We will see," replied Beauchamp, quietly.

"Then there is the mortgage," said Mr. Wharton.

"That will be dealt with as we shall be advised," rejoined the young nobleman; "the matter of the mortgage has nothing to do with the business before us; and, moreover, Mr. Wharton, I will beg you not to interfere here, till you are called upon. Though a lawyer, you are

exactly in the same position as any other creditor, and in taking out this writ, you have given all power into other hands. If I satisfy the sheriff that he has sufficient security, according to law, for the appearance of Sir John Slingsby, that is all that is necessary ; and I will tell you, sir, that sooner than see a course, which is certainly unhandsome, and which I suspect to be villanous, successful against my friend, even so far as to remove him from his own house for an hour, I would pay the amount of all claims upon him to the sheriff under protest. I have the means of doing so at command, this moment, and therefore be very sure that your arts will avail you nothing.—Sir, I understand you,” he added, sternly ; “the property upon which you have advanced a pitiful sum of fifty thousand pounds, and by accumulating interest upon interest, and costs upon costs, have raised the debt to nearly eighty thousand, is worth, at least, two hundred. The bait was tempting, sir ; but beware that, in snapping at it too eagerly, you have not got the hook in your jaws. There is such a thing, sir, as striking fraudulent attorneys off the roll, and, at all events, be sure that, however pleasant it might be to possess this estate, you will never have it.”

“I do not want it, sir,” cried Mr. Wharton, half mad with rage and vexation ; “I would not have it if you would give it to me.”

Beauchamp laughed, and Sir John Slingsby shouted ; while all the other persons in the room, not excepting bailiffs, tittered, without disguise, to the lawyer’s sad discomfort.

“Ah ! here comes Miles,” exclaimed Sir John, “and Mr. Under-sheriff too, by Jove ! That is lucky ; the matter will soon be settled now. How are you, Doctor, how are you, Mr. Sheriff ? you are the very man we wanted.”

“I am very sorry for all this business, Sir John,” said a tall, gentleman-like person, whom he had addressed ; “but having business at Tarningham, and hearing of the unfortunate occurrence by the way, I thought it better to come up myself, as I felt sure the action could be bailed.”

“And so it can,” cried Sir John Slingsby ; “here stands bail ready in the person of my friend, Lord Lenham ; but that pitiful little snivelling rogue, Wharton, objects.”

“Ah ! good day, Wharton,” said the sheriff, drily ; “why do you object ?”

“No, I do not object,” replied the attorney ; “the men here, Bulstrode and the rest, thought there might be detainers, and the process having——”

“No, no !” cried the officer, “we thought nothing about

it, till you told us to refuse the bail till we had searched the office. I've a shrewd guess, Mr. Wharton, that you have got up all the creditors here who could lodge detainers, and his lordship offers to pay all honest debts at once, and to put in bail against yours."

"Honest debts! what do you mean by that?" exclaimed Wharton, furiously; but the sheriff interfered, and at the same time Doctor Miles and Beauchamp, who had been speaking together, turned round, and the clergyman introduced his young friend to the officer of the county by the title of Viscount Lenham.

"This matter, I think, can be settled with you, sir, in a few words," said Beauchamp. "I do not choose to see my friend, Sir John Slingsby, wronged. It so happens, that intending to buy an estate in this neighbourhood, I have had a considerable sum paid lately into the Tarningham bank. I am ready to give bail bond to any amount you may think necessary to your own security, that Sir John appears to the action of Mr. Wharton, or any one else; or to pay into your hands any sum claimed, under protest. I think, in these circumstances, there can be no need of removing Sir John from his own house."

"Not in the least," said the sheriff; "bail will be quite sufficient, and can be given here quite as well as ten miles hence."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed Mr. Wharton, "there may be detainers for aught you know, and to a large amount."

"I will take my chance of that, Wharton," replied the under-sheriff; "there were none when I came away; for I had occasion to examine the books. It is not usual to lodge detainers till caption has been actually effected, I think, my good friend."

"Your proceeding is very rash and irregular, sir," replied the lawyer, nettled, "and I should certainly object if——"

"Pooh, pooh!" cried the sheriff, "I am the best judge of my own affairs; and you are meddling with what does not concern you, Mr. Wharton. If I take sufficient bail for Sir John's appearance to your action, that is all you have to do with, and perhaps more; so let us have no more of this; for I will not be meddled with in the discharge of my duties. You tried this once before, sir, and did not find it succeed."

"Well, sir, take your own way—take your own way!" cried Mr. Wharton, in a sharp tone; "the sum is large; if the bail be not good, you are responsible. A gentleman who goes about the country under one false name, in my

very well take another. I do not mean to say that it is so; but this gentleman who calls himself Lord Lenham now, and called himself Mr. Beauchamp a few days ago, may be the greatest swindler in England for aught any of us know."

"Swindlers do not usually have large sums at the banker's," said Mr. Miles, drily; "that is to say, Mr. Wharton, not those swindlers whom the law is willing to take hold of, though I have known many rich men who swindled a good deal within the law, especially in your profession. But to set all that at rest, I will join in the bond, if necessary, and I possess means, I trust, sufficient to ensure Mr. Under-sheriff against all risk.—There comes Bacon, trotting up on his little fat horse. Bacon is a very excellent man, considering the temptations of profession and example."

"Well, as my opinion is of no value, my presence can be of no use," said Mr. Wharton; "and I shall therefore go. Good morning, gentlemen—Sir John Slingsby, good morning."

The baronet took a step forward, looking at the lawyer somewhat ominously, while the good stout calf of his leg might be seen to tremble a little, as if agitated by the simultaneous action of antagonist muscles; but then he stopped, saying aloud,—

"No, I won't kick him—no, I won't kick anybody any more."

"A very prudent resolution, Sir John," said Dr. Miles; "pray adhere to it; and if you include the horsewhip in your renunciations, you will do well."

Mr. Wharton was suffered to retreat, un-kicked; the matter of the bail bond was easily arranged; all the rest of the business passed quietly; the bailiffs and their satellites were withdrawn from the house; the creditors who remained, paid; and the under-sheriff took his leave. Somewhat more time had been expended, indeed, than Beauchamp had expected that the affair would occupy, ere he, Sir John Slingsby, and Doctor Miles, were once more left alone in the library; but then the baronet seized his friend's hand, with an unwonted dew in his eyes, saying,—

"How can I ever thank you for your noble conduct? I cannot show my gratitude—but you must be secured. You shall have a mortgage for the whole sum: the estate can well bear it, I am sure, notwithstanding all that fellow Wharton says."

"I am quite convinced it can, Sir John," answered

Beauchamp, "and I will accept your offer, because, for reasons of my own, I am exceedingly anxious that you should be under no possible obligation to me; and now let us join the ladies; for they will think we are never coming."

Dr. Miles smiled; for though he had never played at the games of love and matrimony, he had been a looker-on all his life, and understood them well. Sir John Slingsby was totally unconscious, and led the way to the drawing-room, marvelling a little perhaps—for he was not a vain man—at the fact of his having so completely won Beauchamp's regard, and created such an interest in his bosom, but never attributing to his daughter any share therein.

"Here, Isabel," cried the old gentleman, as they entered the room where the three ladies were seated, watching the door as if their fate hung upon its hinges, "shake this gentleman by the hand, as the best friend your father ever had."

"I do thank him, from my heart," said Isabella, giving Beauchamp her hand, with tears in her eyes; "but yet, my dear father," she added frankly, "Mr. Beauchamp would think me ungenerous, if I did not tell you that you have another friend, who has acted in as kind and noble a manner as himself. I mean Captain—no, I will call him by his old name, Ned Hayward; for to him we owed the means of discharging the debt to that man Wittingham."

"The obligation is infinitely greater to him than to me, my dear Miss Slingsby," said Beauchamp; "for I know that Hayward's income is not very large, while, in my case, there is really no obligation at all. This money was lying idle, and it might just as well be invested in one way as another."

"But every one is not so ready to invest money in a friend's relief," said Sir John, "and I shall never forget it. Hang me, my dear girl, if I can tell what he found out in me to like or respect! I never could discover anything of the kind myself."

Isabella coloured to the eyes, but answered at once,—

"Mr. Beauchamp consulted only his own noble heart."

"Mr. Beauchamp!" cried Sir John Slingsby, with one of his merry laughs; Mr. Beauchamp has nothing to do with it, Bella. I am not in the least indebted to Mr. Beauchamp."

Isabella, Mrs. Clifford, and Mary, were all alarmed; for they might well fear that the events of that morning had somewhat affected Sir John Slingsby's brain. But he soon relieved them.

"No, Isabella," he continued, "it is to this gentleman I am indebted—let me introduce him to you. Isabella—Lord Lenham! Lord Lenham—my daughter."

Isabella cast her eyes to the ground; and a shade of deep, and, it seemed to Beauchamp, anxious thought, came over her face; but the next moment she looked up, all bright and sparkling again, and exclaimed,—

"So, Lord Lenham has thought fit to come upon us in masquerade. That was hardly fair, my lord."

"Some day, when Miss Slingsby will let me tell a long story, she shall hear the reasons why," answered Beauchamp, "and may then judge whether it was fair or not. If she decides the cause in my favour, she may tell the pleadings to the whole party; if she thinks I have greatly erred, she shall forgive the offender, and conceal his crime under the seal of confession."

Again Isabella blushed deeply; and Sir John Slingsby made the matter worse, by exclaiming, "Ho, ho! it is to be a private conference, is it? We are all to be kept in the dark, as indeed I have been lately; for all I know is, that I have been placed in a very unpleasant and unexpected situation this morning, and as suddenly relieved from it by the affection of two dear girls, and the generosity of our noble friend. I have not thanked you yet, my dear Mary; but pray let me hear how all this has been brought about, that I may do so discreetly."

"In the meantime," said Beauchamp, "I, who know the whole, will walk back again to my poor friend, Hayward, and tell him how all things have gone."

"You promised to dine—you promised to dine," cried Sir John Slingsby; "no breach of promise, or I will have my action against you."

"I will keep mine to the letter," replied Beauchamp, "and be back in a couple of hours."

"And bring Ned Hayward with you," said the baronet.

Beauchamp explained that such a thing was impossible, saying that his friend had become somewhat worse in health since the preceding night, but without giving any cause for alarm. His eyes turned towards Mary Clifford as he spoke, with a momentary glance which sufficed, by the paleness that spread over her face, to confirm suspicions which he had entertained since the night before. He was too much a gentleman in heart to keep his eyes there more than that one moment, for he felt that it would not only be a rudeness, but an unkindness.

"I will walk with you, my good lord," said Doctor

Miles. "I long to see Captain Hayward. He has particularly interested me."

"And you will walk back with Lord Lenham to dinner, doctor?" said Sir John, as gaily as ever. "We will have one jolly evening after all this fracas, at all events."

"I will come to dinner," replied Dr. Miles, "expressly to keep it from being too jolly, you incorrigible old gentleman."

But Sir John only laughed, and the peer and the priest walked away together.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"You said, just now, doctor," observed Beauchamp, as they strolled through the park, "that Ned Hayward particularly interested you. I am glad of it, for he did so with me from the first, without my well knowing why; and we are always glad to find a prepossession which savours perhaps a little of weakness, kept in countenance by others for whom we have a respect."

"You mistake," replied the doctor, with the dry spirit upon him. "In my case it is no prepossession; neither did he interest me from the first. I generally can give a reason for what I feel. I am no being of impulses. Indeed," he continued, more discursively, "I was anything but prepossessed in Captain Hayward's favour. I knew he had been brought up in the army, under the judicious auspices of Sir John Slingsby. That dear girl, Isabella, told me that, from what she could remember of him, he was a gay, lively, rattling fellow. Sir John called him the best fellow that ever lived, and I know tolerably well what that means. The reason, then, why he interested me very soon, was because he disappointed me. For half an hour after I first saw him, I thought he was just what I expected—a man constitutionally lively, gay from want of thought, good-humoured from want of feeling; having some talents, but no judgment; acting right occasionally by impulse, but not by principle."

"You did him great injustice," said Beauchamp, warmly.

"I know I did," replied the clergyman, "but not long. A thousand little traits showed me that, under the shining and rippling surface of the lake, there were deep, still waters. The singular delicacy and judgment with which he treated that business of the scandalous attack upon Mrs.

Clifford's carriage; the kindly skill with which he led Sir John away from the subject, when he found that it distressed poor Mary; his conduct towards the poacher and his boy; his moderation and his gentleness in some cases, and his vigour and his resolution in others, soon set all preconceived opinions to rights. He has one fault, however, which is both a very great and a very common one—he conceals his good qualities from the eyes of others. This is a great wrong to society. If all good and honest men would but show themselves as they really are, they would stare vice out of countenance; and if even those who are not altogether what we wish, would show the good that is in them, and conceal the bad, they would put vice and folly out of fashion; for I do believe that there are far more good men, and even a greater amount of good qualities amongst those who are partly bad, than the world knows anything about. So you see I am not a misanthrope."

"I never suspected you of being so, my dear doctor," said Beauchamp; "if I had, I should not have attempted to create an interest in you for myself."

"Ay, then, you had an interested motive in coming up every other day to my little rectory, just at the time that Isabella Slingsby visited her poor and her schools!" cried Dr. Miles, laughing; "but I understand it—I understand it all, my noble lord—there is not such a thing as a purely disinterested man on earth: the difference is simply the sort of interest men seek to serve—some are filthy interests, such as avarice, ambition, ostentation, even gluttony—how I have seen men fawn upon the givers of good dinners! Then there are maudlin interests, such as love and its et ceteras; and then, again, there are the generous interests; but I am afraid I must class those you sought to serve in such friendly visitations, amongst the maudlin ones—is it not so?"

"Not exactly," answered Beauchamp; "for if you remember, my good friend, you will find that I came up to your house at the same hour, and as often, before I saw Miss Slingsby there, as afterwards. Moreover, during the whole time I did so come, before I was introduced to her father, I never had a thought of offering her my hand, how much soever I might admire and esteem her."

Dr. Miles turned round, and looked at his companion, peacefully, for a moment or two.

"I do not know what to make of you," he said, at length.

"I will tell you," replied Beauchamp, with a sad smile,

"for I do not believe any one could divine the causes which have led me to act a somewhat unusual, if not eccentric part, without knowing events which took place many years ago. I told you once that I wished to make you my father confessor. I had not time then to finish all I had to say; but my intention has been still the same, and it is now necessary, for Miss Slingsby's sake, that I should execute it: we shall have time in going over, and I will make my story short. You are probably aware that I was an only son, my father having never married after my mother's death, my mother having survived my birth only a few hours. My father was a man of very keen sensibilities, proud of his name, his station, and his family—proud of their having been all honourable, and not one spot of reproach having ever rested on his lineage. He was too partially fond of me, too, as the only pledge of love left him by one for whom he sorrowed with a grief that unnerved his mind, and impaired his corporeal health. I was brought up at home, under a careful tutor, for my father had great objections, partly just, partly I believe unjust, towards schools. At home, I was a good deal spoiled, and had too frequently my own way, till I was sent to college, where I first learned something of the world, but, alas! not much, and I have had harder lessons since. The first of these was the most severe. My cousin, Captain Moreton, was ten years older than myself; but he had not yet shown his character fully. My father and myself knew nothing of it; for though he paid us an annual visit for a week or two, the greater part of his time was spent either here or in Scotland, where he had a grand-aunt who doted upon him. One year, when I was just twenty, while he was on a shooting party at our house in October, he asked me to go down with him in the following summer, to shoot grouse at old Miss Moreton's. I acceded readily, and my father as willingly gave his consent. We set out on the twenty-fifth of July, and I was received with all sorts of Scotch hospitality at Miss Moreton's house. There were many persons there at dinner, and amongst the rest a Miss Charlotte Hay——"

"Why do you stop?" asked Dr. Miles.

"A Miss Charlotte Hay," continued Beauchamp, with an evident effort, "a very beautiful person, and highly accomplished. She was some three or four years older than myself, I believe, affecting a romantic style of thought, feeling, and language. She was beautiful, I have said; but hers was not the style of beauty I admired; and at first I took but little notice of her. She sang well, how-

ever ; and before the first evening was over we had talked a good deal—the more, perhaps, as I found that most of the ladies present, though of no very high station, nor particularly refined manners, did not seem to love her conversation. It appeared to me that she was superior to them ; and when I found that, though of good family, her fortune was extremely limited, and that she had resided with old Miss Moreton for some time, as something between a friend and a companion, I fancied I understood the coldness I observed on the part of more wealthy people. Many days passed over, during which she certainly endeavoured to attract and captivate me. I was in general somewhat on my guard ; but I was then young, inexperienced, vain, romantic ; and though I never dreamed of making her my wife, yet I trifled away many an hour by her side, feeling passion growing upon me—mark, I say passion, not love ; for there was much that prevented me from respecting her enough to love her—a display of her person, a carelessness of proprieties, an occasional gleam of perverted principle, that no art could hide. Once or twice, too, I caught a smile passing between her and my cousin Moreton, which I did not like ; and whenever that occurred it recalled me to myself ; but, with weak facility, I fell back again till the day of my departure approached. Two or three days before—on the eleventh of August, which was my twenty-first birth-day—Miss Moreton declared she would have a party of her neighbours to celebrate the event. None of the higher and more respectable gentry were invited, or, if they were, they did not come. There were a good many deep drinking lairds, and some of their wives and daughters, somewhat stiff in their graver, and hoydenish in their merrier, moments. It is one of those days that the heart longs for years to blot out for ever. I gave way to the high spirits which were habitual to me. I drank deep—deeper than I had ever before done. I suffered my brain to be troubled—I know not that there were not unfair means used to effect it, but, at all events, I was not myself. I recollect personally little that passed ; but I have since heard that I was called upon to choose a wife for the afternoon. I was told it was the custom of the country, on such occasions, so to do in sport ; and that I fixed, at once upon this artful girl. In the presence of many witnesses I called her wife, and she called me husband. The evening passed over ; I drank more wine at supper, and the next morning I found myself married—for the infamous fraud they called a marriage. In horror and dismay, I burst away from the wretched

woman who had lent herself to such a base transaction. I sent off my servant at once for horses to my carriage ; I cast Moreton from me, who attempted to stop and reason with me, as he called it, representing that what had taken place was a full and sufficient marriage, according to the code of Scotland, for that public consent was all that was required by their law."

"Or by the law of God either," replied Dr. Miles, "but it must be free and intelligent consent."

"I travelled night and day," continued Beauchamp, rapidly, "till I had reached my father's house and thrown myself at his feet. I told him all—I extenuated, concealed nothing ; and I shall never forget either his kindness or his distress of mind. Instant steps were taken to ascertain the exact position in which I stood ; and the result was fatal to my hopes of happiness and peace ; for not only did he find that I was entangled past recall, but that the character of the woman herself was such as might be expected from her having been a party to so disgraceful a scheme. She had been blighted by scandal before she took up her residence in the house where I found her. Miss Moreton in her dotage, yielded herself blindly to my cousin's guidance ; and there was more than a suspicion that he had made his aunt's protection a veil to screen his own paramour."

"What did you do ? what did you do ?" asked Dr. Miles, with more eagerness than he usually displayed ; "it was a hard case indeed."

"I went abroad immediately," replied Beauchamp, "for my father exacted from me a solemn promise never to live with or to see, if it could be avoided, the woman who had thus become my wife. He used strong and bitter, but just, terms in speaking of her. 'He could not survive the thought,' he said, 'that the children of a prostitute should succeed to the title of a family without a stain.' My promise was given willingly, for I will confess that hate and indignation and disgust rendered her very idea odious to me. My father remained in England for some months, promising to make such arrangements regarding money—the base object of the whole conspiracy—that I should never be troubled any more. He added, tenderly and sadly, though gravely and firmly, that further he could do nothing ; for that I must bear the consequences of one great error in a solitary and companionless life. In consideration of a promise on the woman's part never to molest me, nor to take my name, he settled upon her the sum of a thousand pounds per

annum. During my father's life I heard no more of her; but when he himself joined me in Italy, I could see but too plainly how grief and bitter disappointment had undermined a constitution already shaken. He did not long survive, and all that I have myself undergone has been little compared with the thought that the consequences of my folly served to shorten the days of my kind, good parent."

"But what became of the woman?" demanded Dr. Miles; "you surely have had tidings of her since?"

"Within a month after my father's death," replied Beauchamp, "I received from her one of the most awful letters that woman ever wrote, claiming to be received as my wife. But I will not trouble you with the details. Threats succeeded to blandishments, and I treated these with contempt, as I had the others with coldness. Then commenced a new system of persecution; she followed me, attempted to fix herself upon me. Once she arrived at an inn in the Tyrol as I was getting into my carriage, and declared before the people round that she was my abandoned wife. I answered not a word, but ordered the door to be closed and the postilions to drive on. Then came applications for an increased annuity, but I would not yield one step, knowing that it would but lead to others; and in the end, to free myself from every-day annoyance, I took the name of Beauchamp, hurried on to the East, directed my agent to conceal my address from every one, and for several years wandered far and wide. At length the tidings reached me that the annuity, which had at first been punctually demanded, had not been applied for; a report, too, reached my lawyer's ears that she had died in Paris. Still I would not return to claim my rank, lest there should be some deep scheme at work; and I continued in India and Syria for two years longer. The annuity remained unclaimed. I knew that she had expensive habits and no means; and I ventured back. I passed a few months in London without resuming my own name; but the noise and bustle of the great city wearied me, and I came hither. Inquiries in the meantime had been made, somewhat languidly, perhaps, to ascertain the fate of this unhappy woman; but here I saw Isabella Slingsby, and those inquiries have been since pursued rapidly and strictly. Every answer tended to one result; and yesterday morning I received a letter from my solicitor, informing me that there can be no doubt of her demise. I will show it to you hereafter; but therein he says that her effects in Paris had been publicly sold, as those of a person de-

ceased, to pay the claims of her maid, who had brought forward sufficient proofs to satisfy the police that her mistress had died in Italy. The girl herself could not be found by my agents; but the lawyers consider this fact, coupled with the total cessation of claims for the annuity, as proving the death of Charlotte Hay, and removing all doubt that this bitter bond is cancelled for ever."

"That is clear—that is clear," said Dr. Miles, who at this moment was pausing with his companion at a stile; "and now, I suppose, it is hand and heart for Isabella Slingsby?"

"Assuredly," said Beauchamp; "but she must be informed of all this, and it is not a tale for me to tell."

"Will you have the kindness, sir," said a voice from the other side of the hedge, as Beauchamp put his foot upon the first step of the stile, "to keep on that side, and go out by the gate at the corner?"

"Oh, is that you in the ditch, Stephen?" said Beauchamp; "very well, my good man, one way is as good as the other."

"I am watching something here, sir," said the game-keeper, in a low voice, "and if you come over you'll disturb the thing."

Beauchamp nodded, and went on in the way directed; and Dr. Miles, who had been meditating, replied to what he had said just before the interruption of the game-keeper.

"But who else can do it? Sir John is unfit. Me, you would have? Humph! It is not a pleasant story for even an old gentleman to tell to a young lady."

"Yet she must know it," answered Beauchamp; "I will, I can have no concealment from her."

"Assuredly there you are right," replied Dr. Miles; "and I am sure the dear girl will value your sincerity properly."

"She can but say that I committed a great error," answered Beauchamp, "and for that error I have been punished by long years of bitterness."

"Well, well, I will do my best," answered the rector; "but make your proposal first, and refer her to me for the story of your life. I will deal in generals—I will not go into details. That you can do hereafter, if you like."

Thus conversing they walked on, and soon after reached the cottage of Stephen Gimlet, where they found Ned Hayward beginning to feel relief from the operation which the surgeon had performed in the morning. Beauchamp returned to him the sum which he had received from Miss

Slingsby in the morning, saying, that he had found no necessity for using it, and Dr. Miles sat down by him, and talked with cheerful kindness for about a quarter of an hour. Was it tact, and a clear perception of people's hearts, that led the worthy clergyman to select Mary Clifford for one of the subjects of his discourse, and to enlarge upon her high qualities? At all events he succeeded in raising Captain Hayward's spirits ere he set out again upon his way homeward.

When he descended, he found Gimlet, the gamekeeper, seated with Widow Lamb; and the man, as he opened the door, apologised for having stopped the rector and Mr. Beauchamp at the stile, but did not state in what he had been so busily engaged. As soon, however, as Dr. Miles was gone, Stephen Gimlet resumed his conversation with Mrs. Lamb, and it was a low-toned and eager one. From time to time the old lady bowed her head, saying, "Yes;" but she added nothing to the monosyllable for some time. At length, however, in answer to something that her son-in-law said, she exclaimed,—

"No, Stephen, do not speak with him about it; I tried it this morning, and it had a terrible effect upon him. It seemed to change him altogether, and made him, so kind and gentle as he is, quite fierce and sharp. Speak with his friend, Captain Hayward: for neither you nor I can know what all this may mean. But, above all, watch well, for it is clear they are about no good; and tell me always what you hear and see, for I cannot help thinking that I know more of these matters than the young lord does himself. A bitter bond did he call it? Well, it may be a bond for the annuity you heard him talk of; but, then, why does she not claim it? There must be some object, Stephen."

The good old lady's consideration of the subject was prevented at that moment from proceeding further, by the entrance of her son, Billy Lamb, who came up and kissed her affectionately. The lad was somewhat pale, and there was an air of fatigue in his small, pinched, but intelligent countenance, which made his mother hold him to her heart with a feeling of painful anxiety. Oh, how the affections of a parent twine themselves round a suffering child!

"Sit down, Bill," said Stephen Gimlet, kindly, "you look tired, my lad. I will get you a draught of beer."

"I cannot wait, Ste," answered the pot-boy, "for I must be back as quick as I can; but I can look in to see mother for a minute every day now. The gentleman who has got the little lone cottage on the edge of Chandleigh

Heath gives me half-a-crown a week to bring up his letters and newspapers, and I take the time when all the folks are at dinner in our house."

"And get no dinner yourself, poor Bill," said Stephen Gimlet; "cut him a slice of the cold bacon, mother, and a hunch of bread. He can eat it as he goes. I'll run and draw him a draught of beer. It won't keep you a minute, Bill, and help you on, too."

He waited for no reply, but ran with a jug in his hand to the outhouse where his beer-barrel stood. When he came back, the boy drank eagerly, kissed the old lady again, and then set out with the bread and bacon in his hand; but Stephen Gimlet walked out with him, and after they had taken a few steps, he asked,—

"Who is it, Bill, has got the cottage?"

"I don't know," answered the lad. "A tall, strong man he is, with large whiskers all the way under his chin, a little grayish. He met me last night, when I took up a parcel from Mr. Groomer to Buxton's inn, and asked if I came that way every day. I said I did not, but could come if he wanted anything."

"But you must know his name if you get his letters, Bill?" said Gimlet.

"No, I do not, but I soon can," answered the deformed youth. "He took me into the cottage, and made the lady give him some paper and a pen and ink, and wrote a note to the postmaster, and gave me a half-crown, and said I should have the same every week. The postmaster wrapped up the letters and things in a bit of paper, and I did not think to look at it, but I can soon find out, if you want to know."

"No," answered Stephen Gimlet, drily; "I know already. Well, Bill, good-by; I must go about my work." And so they parted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT a table in the room, with her foot upon a footstool, and a pillow behind her back, sat a lady whom we have before described; and certainly, to look at her face, handsome as it was, no one would have fancied there was a fierce and fiery spirit beneath, so weak and, I may venture to call it, lack-a-daisical was the expression.

"Heaven, Moreton, how you startled me!" cried the lady. "Where have you been such a long time? You

know I want society at night. It is only at night I am half alive."

"Well," said Captain Moreton, with a laugh, "I have been half dead and half buried; for I have been down into a vault and shut up in a vestry as a close prisoner. I only got out by wrenching off the bars. Nobody could see my face, however, so that was lucky; for they can but say I was looking for a register by candlelight, and the old sexton will not 'peach for his own sake."

"Still at those rash tricks, Moreton," said the lady; "it will end in your getting hanged, depend upon it. I have been writing a poem called 'The Rash Man,' and I was just hanging him when you came in and startled me."

"My rash tricks, as you call them, got you a thousand a year once," answered Moreton, sharply; "so, in pity, leave your stupid poetry, Charlotte, and listen to what I have to say."

"Stupid poetry!" exclaimed the lady, angrily. "There was a time when you did not call it so; and, as for the thousand a year, it was more to serve yourself than to serve me that you fancied that scheme. You know that I hated the pedantic boy, as virtuous as a young kid, and as pious as his grandmother's prayer-book! Nothing would have induced me to marry him, if you had not represented——"

"Well, never mind all that," answered Captain Moreton, interrupting her. "We have something else to think of now, Charlotte. I don't know that it would not be better for me to be off, after all."

"Well, I am ready to go whenever you like," replied the lady. "I am sure it is not very pleasant to stay in this place, seeing nobody and hearing nothing; without opera, or concert, or coffee-house, or anything. I shall be very glad to go."

"Ay, ay, but that is a different matter," said Captain Moreton, considerably. "I said it would be perhaps better for me to be off; but I am quite sure it would be better for you to stay."

The lady looked at him for a moment or two with the eyes of a tiger. If she had had a striped or spotted skin upon her back, one would have expected her to spring at his throat the next minute; but she had acquired a habit of commanding her passions to a certain point, beyond which they indeed became totally ungovernable, but which was not yet attained; and she contented herself with giving Captain Moreton one of those coups de patte with which she sometimes treated him. "So, Moreton," she said, "you think that you can go away and leave me to take

care of myself, as you did some time ago; but you are mistaken, my good friend. I have become wiser now, and I certainly shall not suffer you."

"How will you stop me?" asked her companion, turning sharply upon her.

"As to stopping you," she replied, with a sneer, "I do not know that I can. You are a strong man and I am a weak woman, and in a tussle you would get the better; but I could bring you back, Moreton, you know, if I did not stop you."

"How?" demanded he again, looking fiercely at her.

"By a magistrate's warrant, and half a dozen constables," answered the lady. "You do not think I have had so much experience of your amiable ways for nothing, or that I have not taken care to have proofs of a good many little things that would make you very secure in any country but America—that dear land of liberty, where fraud and felony find refuge and protection."

"Do you mean to say that you would destroy me, woman?" exclaimed Captain Moreton.

"Not exactly destroy you," replied his fair companion, "though you would make a fine criminal under the beam. I have not seen an execution for I do not know how long, and it is a fine sight, after all—better than all the tragedies that ever were written. It's no fun seeing men kill each other in jest—one knows that they come to life again as soon as the curtain falls; but once hanging over the drop, or lying on the guillotine, there's no coming to life any more. I should like to see you hanged, Moreton, when you are hanged. You would hang very well, I dare say."

She spoke in the quietest, most sugary tone possible, with a slight smile upon her lip, and amused herself while she did so in sketching with the pen and ink a man under a beam, with a noose round his neck. Captain Moreton gazed at her meanwhile with his teeth hard shut, and not the most placable countenance in the world, as she brought vividly up before his imagination all those things which crime is too much accustomed and too willing to forget.

"And you, Charlotte, you would do this!" he exclaimed, at length; "but it is all nonsense; and how you can talk of such things I cannot imagine, when I merely spoke of going myself and leaving you for a short time, for your own good."

"For my own good! Oh yes; I have heard all that before, more than twelve years ago," replied the lady. "I yielded to your notions of my own good then, and much good has come of it, to me, at least. So do not talk of ever

separating your fate from mine again, Moreton; for were you to attempt it, I would do as I have said, depend upon it."

"It was your own good I thought about," replied Captain Moreton, bitterly, "and that you will soon see when you hear the whole. Do you not think if Lenham were to find out that you are living here with me, there would soon be suits in the ecclesiastical courts for divorce and all the rest?"

"Oh, you know, we talked about all that before," replied the lady, "and took our precautions. You are here as my earliest friend, assisting me to regain my rights, nothing more. All that was settled long ago, and I see no reason for beginning it all over again."

"But there is a reason," answered Captain Moreton, "as you would have heard before now, if you would have let me speak; but you are so diabolically hasty and violent. I brought you the best news you could have, if you would but listen."

"Indeed!" said the lady, looking up from the pleasant sketch she was finishing, with an expression of greater interest, "what may that be?"

"Why, simply, that Lenham has proposed to Miss Slingsby," replied Captain Moreton, "and they are to be married directly—as soon as that fellow, Wittingham, is out of all danger."

Her eyes flashed at the intelligence, and her lip curled with a triumphant smile, as she inquired, "Where did you hear it? Who told you? Are you sure?"

"Quite," answered Moreton. "I had it from old Slatery, the apothecary, who knows the secrets of all the houses round. He told it to me as a thing quite certain."

"Then I have him! Then I have him!" exclaimed his companion, joyfully. "Oh, I will make him drink the very dregs of a bitterer cup than ever he has held to my lips."

"But you must be very careful," said Captain Moreton—"not the slightest indiscretion—not the slightest hint, remember, or all is lost."

"I will be careful," she replied; "but yet all cannot be lost, even if he were to discover that I am alive. He has made a proposal to one woman, when he is already married to another. That would be disgrace enough to blast and wither him like a leaf in the winter. I know him well enough for that. For the first time he has given me the power of torturing him, and I will work that engine till his cold heart cracks, let him do what he will."

"Well, this was the reason I thought it would be better for me to be off for a short time," said Captain Moreton, "though you must remain here."

"I don't see that," cried the lady; "I won't have it."

Her companion had fallen into a fit of thought, however, as soon as he had uttered the last words, and he did not seem to attend to her. His thoughts, indeed, were busy with a former part of their conversation. He felt that he was, as she said, in her power, and he saw very well how sweetly and delicately she was inclined to use power when she did possess it. He therefore asked himself if it might not be as well to put some check upon her violence, before it hurried her into anything that could not be repaired: for although Captain Moreton was fond of a little vengeance himself, yet he loved security better, and thought it would be poor consolation for being hanged, that he had spoiled all her fine schemes. He was still debating this point in his own mind, when, finding that he did not answer, she said,—

"Do you hear? I say I will not have it, and you had better not talk of it any more; for if I take it into my head that you are trying to get off and leave me here, I will take very good care that your first walk shall be into gaol."

"In which case," said Captain Moreton, coldly, "I would, by one word, break the bond between you and Lenham, and send you to prison, too. You think that I am totally in your power, madam; but let me tell you that you are in mine also. Our confidence, it is true, has not been mutual, but our secrets are so."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the lady, turning deadly pale.

"Need I tell you?" asked her companion; "what I mean may be soon understood. You do not understand me, I see by your face, so no more of this. I shall not go, because you do not wish it, and I proposed it only for your good; but now let us have some brandy-and-water, for the night is wonderfully cold for the season."

The lady made no reply, but sat looking down at the table, with her cheek still white, and Moreton got up and rang the bell. A woman-servant appeared, received his orders, and went away; and then turning to his companion, he pulled her cheek familiarly, saying,—

"Come, Charlotte, let us have no more of all this; we had better get on well together. Have any of the servants been into the room to-night since I left you?"

The lady looked up with a sort of bewildered and absent air, saying,—

"No, I think not. Let me see: no, no. I have been sitting writing and sleeping. I fell asleep for an hour, and

then I wrote till you came back. No one has been in, I am sure."

"While you were sleeping they might," said Moreton, thoughtfully.

"No, no," she answered; "I should have heard them instantly; I wake in a moment, you know, with the least sound. Nobody has been in the room, I will swear."

"Then you can swear, too, that I never left it," answered Moreton, laughing; "I mean, that I have been here or hereabouts all night, in case it should be needed."

The lady did not seem at all shocked at the proposal, for she had no great opinion of the sanctity of oaths; and when the servant returned with all that Captain Moreton had demanded, he asked her sharply,—

"Where were you, Kitty, when I rang, about an hour ago?"

"Lord, sir," replied the woman, "I had only run across to ask why they had not sent my beer."

"Well, I wish you would choose some other time for going on such errands," replied Captain Moreton; and there the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BEAUCHAMP took care to be back at Tarningham Park a full hour and a half before dinner-time; but schemes and purposes of making love or a declaration at a certain place and time are never successful. Very often they are put off, and very often they are forced on by circumstances; and although there is no event of life, perhaps, in which the happy moment is more important, it is seldom met with or chosen. Such was the case in the present instance: Sir John Slingsby played third on one occasion, Mrs. Clifford on another, and when Mary, dear considerate girl, after breaking in for a moment, made a very reasonable excuse to retire, the dressing-bell rang as she closed the door, and Beauchamp, knowing that he could not detain Miss Slingsby more than five minutes, would not attempt to crowd all he had to say into so short a space. He was resolved to say something, however, and as Isabella was about to leave him, he stopped her, asking if she knew that her father had invited him to pass the night there.

"Oh, of course," answered his fair companion, in a gay tone; "you do not think he would let you go to pass the

hours of darkness amongst the Goths and Vandals of Tarningham. He would be afraid of your life being attempted. You do not think of going?"

"I have accepted his invitation," answered her lover "because I have several things to talk over with Sir John, and on one subject also with you, dear lady. Will you give me some time in the course of to-morrow—a few minutes—nay, perhaps, an hour alone?"

Isabella coloured and looked away; but she was thankful for a reprieve from immediate agitation, and she replied, in a low tone, "Certainly—but I must go and dress, or my maid will be impatient."

But Beauchamp still detained her for a moment. "You are an early riser, I think," he said; "will you take a walk before breakfast—down towards the stream?—Nay, Isabella, why should you hesitate? Remember, I have a history to give."

"I hope not a sad one," answered Isabella, gaily, "for I think I should be easily moved to tears just now, and I must not return with my eyes red—nay, Beauchamp, let me go, or I shall cry now."

He instantly released the hand he had taken, and Miss Slingsby took a step away, but looked round, and returning at once, gave that fair hand back again, saying, more gravely, "What is the use of any long history?—and yet it had better be. I will take a walk with you when you like; for I must speak with you, too—but not now: there's no time. So farewell for the present,"—and she left him.

The dinner passed more quietly than Sir John Slingsby's dinners usually did. The baronet's spirits, which had risen immensely after the first pressure was taken off, fell again during the course of the day; and, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he was grave and thoughtful throughout the evening. Isabella had her store of meditations, and so had Mary Clifford. The mother of the latter was calm and sedate as usual; and Doctor Miles dry and sententious; so that Beauchamp, happy in what he had done, and happy in the confidence of love, was now the gayest of the party. Thus the evening passed away, though not sadly, anything but very merrily; and the whole party retired early to rest.

The next morning, Beauchamp rose and went down to the drawing-room, but there was nobody there. One of the housemaids just passed out as he entered, and he waited for about a quarter of an hour with some impatience, gazing forth from the windows over the dewy slopes of the park, and thinking in his heart that Isabella was

somewhat long. Now, to say the truth, she was longer than she might have been, for Isabella had been up and dressed some time : but there was a sort of hesitation, a timidity, a weak feeling of alarm, perhaps, which she had never known before. She shrank from the idea of going down to meet him, knowing that he was waiting for her. It would seem like a secret arrangement between them, she thought, and she took fright at the very idea. Then again, on the other hand, she fancied that he might imagine she was treating him ill not to go, after the sort of promise she had made ; and he had been so kind, so generous, so noble, that she could not treat him ill—nay, not even by the appearance of a caprice. That settled the matter ; and, after about a quarter of an hour's debating with herself, down she went. Her heart beat terribly ; but Isabella was a girl who, with all her gaiety and apparent lightness, had great command over herself : and that command in her short life had been often tried. She paused for a moment or two at the door of the drawing-room, struggled with and overcame her agitation, and then went in with a face cleared, a light step, and a cheerful air. Her hand was in Beauchamp's in a moment, and, after a few of the ordinary words of a first morning meeting, he asked, " Will you take a walk, dear Isabella, or shall we remain here ? "

" Do you not see bonnet on my head, and shawl over my arm ? " she said, in a gay tone ; " who would stay in the house on such a bright morning as this when they have a free hour before them ? "

" Come, then," he answered ; and in two minutes more they were walking away together towards the wooded hill through which they had passed with Mary Clifford and Hayward about three weeks before.

It is strange how silent people are when they have much to say to each other. For the first quarter of a mile, neither Beauchamp nor Isabella said a word ; but at length, when the boughs began to wave over their heads, he laid his hand gently upon hers, and said,—

" I think there can be no misunderstanding, Isabella, as to the words I spoke the night before last. Nor must you think me possessed of a very eager vanity if I have construed your reply as favourable to myself. I know you too well not to feel assured that you would not have so answered me had you been inclined to decide against my hopes. But yet, Isabella, I will not and do not consider you as plighted to me by the words then spoken till——"

" That is just what I was going to say," replied Isa-

bella, much to Beauchamp's consternation, "I wished much to speak with you for the very purpose of assuring you that I do not consider you in the least bound by what you then said."

She spoke with a great effort for calmness, but there was an anxious trembling of the voice which betrayed her agitation, and in the end she paused for breath.

"Hear me—hear me," she continued, as she saw Beauchamp about to reply; "since that night everything has changed. I then thought my father embarrassed, but I did not know him to be ruined. I looked upon you as Mr. Beauchamp; I now find you of a rank superior to our own, one who may well look to station and fortune in his bride. You, too, were ignorant of the sad state of my poor father's affairs. It is but fair, then, it is but right that I should set you entirely free from any implied engagement made in a moment of generous thoughtlessness; and I do so entirely, nor will ever for a moment think you do aught amiss if you consider better, more wisely, I will say, of this matter; and let all feelings between us subside into kind friendship on your part, and gratitude and esteem upon mine."

"You set me free?" said Beauchamp, repeating her words with a smile; "how can you? My dear Isabella, this is treacherous of you, to talk of setting me free even while you are binding me heart and spirit to you more strongly than ever. Not one word more upon that subject, my beloved girl. You must not teach me that you think I am so sordid, so pitiful a being as to let a consideration of mere fortune, where I have more than plenty, weigh with me for one moment. I am yours, Isabella, if you will take me—yours for ever, loving you deeply, truly—ay, and understanding you fully, too, which so many do not: but it is I who must set you free, dear girl; and I will not ask, I will not receive any promise till you have heard the story of my past life."

"But you must have it," said Isabella, raising her dewy eyes with a smile; "these things must ever be mutual, my lord. I am yours or you are not mine. But, Beauchamp, we are coquetting with each other. You tell me you love me; I, like all foolish girls, believe. Surely there is no need of any other story but that. Do you suppose, Beauchamp, that after all I have seen of you, after all you have done, I can imagine for one moment that there is anything in the past which could make me change my opinion or withhold my hand? No, no, a woman's confidence, when it is given, is unbounded—at

least, mine is so in you ; and I need not hear of any tale of past days before I bind myself to you by that tie which, to every right mind, must seem as strong as a vow."

"Thanks, dearest girl, thanks!" answered her lover, "but yet you must hear the story—not from my lips, perhaps, for it will be better communicated to you by another—and I have commissioned good Dr. Miles to tell you all ; for I would not have, it said or thought hereafter, by your father or by any one, that I have had even the slightest concealment from you."

"Not to me ! not to me !" said Isabella, eagerly ; and then added, laughing, "I will not listen to the good doctor ; if there is anything that must be said, let it be told to my father."

Beauchamp smiled and shook his head. "You will think me sadly obstinate and exacting," he said, "but yet you must grant me as a favour, Isabella, that which I ask. Listen to our worthy friend the rector. His tale will not be very long ; for many sad things may be told in a few words, and an account of events which have embittered my whole existence, till within the last few days, can be given in five minutes. I will tell Sir John myself ; but the reason why I so earnestly wish you to hear all too, is, that no man can ever judge rightly of the finer feelings of a woman's heart. We cannot tell how things which affect us in one way may affect her ; and as there can be no perfect love without perfect confidence, you must share all that is in my bosom, in the past as well as in the future."

"Well," said Isabella, smiling, "as to obey is to be one of my vows, Beauchamp, I may as well begin my task at once. I will listen to the good doctor, though I confess it is unwillingly ; but still, whatever he says, it will make no difference."

Beauchamp replied not to what she said ; but the conversation took another and a sweeter turn ; and as the words they spoke were certainly not intended to be repeated to the world, I will not repeat them. Time flies swiftly when love's pinions are added to his own ; and Isabella coloured as, in passing the windows of the breakfast-room on their return, she saw the whole party assembled, and Mary occupying her usual post. While Beauchamp entered, and took the first fire of the enemy, she ran up to her room to lay aside her walking-dress ; but Sir John was merciless, and the moment she came in assailed her with an exclamation of "Ha, ha, young lady ! Early

walks and morning rambles, making all your friends believe you have eloped! I hope you have had a pleasant walk, Isabella, with this noble lord. Pray, were you talking politics?"

"Profound!" answered his daughter, with a gay air, though she could not keep the blood from mounting into her cheek.

"And what conclusion did you come to on the state of affairs in general?" continued Sir John, looking from Isabella to Beauchamp. "Is there to be peace or war?"

"First a truce," answered Beauchamp; "and then a lasting peace, the terms of which are to be settled by plenipotentiaries hereafter."

"Oh!" said Sir John Slingsby, now for the first time comprehending how far matters had proceeded between his daughter and his guest; and giving up the jest, he remained in thought for some time.

When breakfast was over, and the party had risen, Beauchamp at once took his host's arm, saying, in a low tone, "Before any other business, I must crave a few moments' conversation, Sir John."

"Certainly—certainly!" said Sir John Slingsby aloud; and while Mary Clifford put her arm through Isabella's, with a heart full of kindly wishes and hopes for her cousin, the baronet led his friend into the library, and their conference commenced. As might be expected, Beauchamp met no coldness on the part of Sir John Slingsby; but after a hearty shake of the hand, an eulogium well deserved upon his daughter, and an expression of his entire satisfaction and consent, the baronet's ear was claimed for the tale of Beauchamp's previous life. It did not produce the effect he expected; for although he had some acquaintance with Sir John's character and habits, he certainly did not anticipate the bursts of laughter with which the old gentleman listened to events which had rendered him miserable. But there are two sides to everything; and Sir John had all his life taken the risible point of view of all subjects. He laughed, then, heartily; declared it an exceedingly good joke, but no marriage at all; and it was only when he found that counsel learned in the law had pronounced it to be valid, that he began to look at the matter more seriously. As soon, however, as he heard the intelligence which Beauchamp had lately received from Paris, he started up from his chair, exclaiming, "Well, then, she's dead, and that's an end of it. So

now I congratulate you, my dear lord, and say that the sooner the marriage is over the better. I shall tell Isabella so, and she has no affectations, thank God! But come, let us go to her. I must kiss her, and give her my blessing."

The whole conversation had occupied nearly an hour, and when Sir John Slingsby and Beauchamp entered the drawing-room, they found it only tenanted by Isabella and good Dr. Miles. Her face was uncommonly serious, one might say sad, and the worthy clergyman's was not gay.

"You are a funny fellow, Dr. Miles," said the baronet; "I'll talk to you in a minute, but I must first give my daughter a kiss—the first she has had this morning, for she played truant, and is going to do so again." So saying, he pressed his lips upon Isabella's cheek, and whispered a few words, that made her colour vary; and then linking his arm in that of Dr. Miles, led him from the room, leaving his daughter and her lover alone together.

Isabella's face looked sadder and graver than Beauchamp had ever seen it; and, to say the truth, his heart began to beat somewhat uneasily, especially as for a moment or two she did not speak, but remained with her eyes bent down. "Isabella," he said at length—"Isabella, you look very sad!"

"How can I be otherwise, Beauchamp," asked the fair girl, holding out her hand to him, "when I have just heard a narrative of events which have embittered all your life? I grieve for you very truly, indeed, and sympathize with you as much as a woman can do, with one placed in circumstances in which she could never find herself. But indeed, Beauchamp, it shall be the pleasant task of my whole life to make you forget these past sorrows."

His hand clasped more warmly upon hers as she spoke, and in the end he sat down by her on the sofa; his arm glided round her waist, and his lips were pressed upon hers. She had not the slightest touch of Miss Biron about her; and, though she blushed a little, she was not horrified or shocked in the least.

"Then you do not blame?" he said; "and notwithstanding all this you are mine, dearest girl?"

"Why should I blame you?" said Isabella, with a smile; "you were not the person in fault—except, perhaps, in having drunk too much wine once in your life; and I suppose that is what all young men do, and old men, too, very often; but the punishment has certainly far

exceeded the offence ; and as to being yours, Beauchamp, you know that I am—or at least will be, when you wish it."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As it is a fine day, and those large heavy floating clouds give frequently a pleasant shade, I do not see why we should not follow Billy Lamb up to Chandleigh Heath. How quick the little fellow's long, disproportioned legs carry his small round turkey-shaped body! But Billy Lamb must be going to visit his mother after he has fulfilled his errand, or he would not walk so fast this warm noontide. It is a round of six miles, yet he will do it in an hour and a quarter. On my life he is already on the heath. One can hardly keep up with him; and now he is at the cottage garden-gate.

It had been built by a coarse, vulgar man, was inhabited by an arrant scoundrel; and there the arrant scoundrel was, walking in his small domain with the lady whom we have more than once mentioned. He looked sharply round when he heard the garden-gate squeak; but was perfectly composed at the sight of the little pot-boy. The letters and papers he took, and looked at the covers, and then, with an indifferent air, asked,—

"Well, my lad, what news is stirring in your little town?"

"Not much, sir," said Billy Lamb; "only about the marriage of the lord and Miss Slingsby."

The lady's eyes flashed unpleasantly, and her companion inquired,—

"Well, what about that?"

"Nothing, sir, but that it is to be on Monday week, they say," replied Billy Lamb; "and all the people are as busy as possible about it, some talking, and others working hard to get all ready; for Miss Isabella will have everything she can made in Tarningham."

"D—d badly made they will be," answered the gentleman; "and what is the lord about?"

"Oh, nothing, that I know of, sir," rejoined the pot-boy, "only all his people and things are coming down, carriages, and horses, and that. The yard is quite full of them."

"And so it is to be on Monday week, is it?" rejoined Captain Lloretton; "well, the sooner the better."

"Yes, yes," cried the lady, "and he may have guests at his marriage that he does not expect."

She spoke with an ungovernable burst of feeling, before her male companion could stop her ; and the boy suddenly raised his clear, intelligent eyes to her countenance, discovering their legible traces of all the furious passions that were at work in her bosom.

"Oh, yes," cried Moreton, endeavouring to give another turn to her indiscreet words, and pressing her arm tight, as a hint to hold her tongue ; "doubtless the whole town and neighbourhood will be there to see."

"Oh dear, yes, sir," answered Billy Lamb ; "though they say they wish it to be quite private. Good morning, sir ;" and he walked away, with a careless air, closing the garden-gate behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha !" exclaimed the worthy captain, laughing aloud ; "this is capital, Charlotte. You see our trout has bit at the fly."

"And I have got the hook in his jaws," said the lady, bitterly.

"Yes," rejoined Captain Moreton ; "and it is now high time that we should consider how we may play our fish to the best advantage. First of all, of course, the marriage must take place, or he will slip off your hook, my fair lady ; but after that, comes the game ; and I think it would be much better to make no great noise even afterwards, but to give him proof positive of your existence ; and, by working upon his apprehensions, and laying him under contribution, we may drain him dry as lay."

"I will have revenge !" cried the lady, fiercely ; "I care for nought else, but I will have revenge ; I will make him a public scoff and a scorn ; I will torture him in a court of justice ; I will break his proud heart under the world's contempt. Try not to stop me, Moreton, for I will have revenge. You think of nothing but money ; but vengeance will be sweeter to me than all the gold of earth."

"There are different sorts of revenge," answered Moreton, quietly ; "and, depend upon it, that which I propose is much more terrible. Once he is married, and quietly informed that you are still living, think what pleasant tortures he would undergo, year after year, as long as you pleased. You would stand behind him like an unseen, but not unseen, fate, shadowing his whole existence with a dark cloud. Every hour he would live in terror of discovery, and shame, and punishment. He would never see a stranger, or receive a letter, without the hasty fears rising

up in his heart. He would picture to himself the breaking up of all his domestic joys ; he would see 'bastard' written on the face of every child ; and his heart would wither and shrivel up, I tell you, like a fallen leaf in the autumn. Sleep would be banished from his bed ; appetite from his table ; cheerfulness from his hearth ; peace from his whole life. Even the sweet cup of love itself would turn to poison on his lips ; and our vengeance would be permanent, perpetual, undecaying. This is the sort of revenge for me !"

"It does not suit me !" cried the lady ; "it does not suit me ! I will have it at once,—I will see him crushed and withering,—I will feast my eyes upon his misery. No, no : such slow, silent vengeance for the cold-blooded and the calm ! I tell you, you shall not stop me !" she continued, fiercely, seeing that he listened to her with a degree of chilling tranquillity which she did not love. "You may take what course you will ; but I will take mine."

"Excellent !" said Captain Moreton, sneeringly ; "excellent, my gentle Charlotte ! but let me just hint that we must act together. You can do nothing without me ; I can stop it all at a word. Pray recollect a little hint I gave you the other night ; and now that the moment is come for drawing the greatest advantages from that which we have been so long labouring to attain, do not drive me to spoil all your plans, by attempting to spoil mine."

"Ha !" said the lady ; "ha !" But she proceeded no further ; and, sinking into herself, walked up and down musingly for several minutes, at the end of which time, she began to hum snatches of an Italian song. Captain Moreton, who knew well her variable humours, thought that the mood was changed ; but he was mistaken. He had planted that of which he was to receive the fruit ere long.

In the meantime, the boy Billy Lamb, having closed, as we have said, the garden-gate, lingered for a moment, and then took his way across the common in the direction of Stephen Gimlet's house, which was at the distance of about a mile and a half. He went at a quick pace, but two or three times he stopped, and thought deeply : he was an observing boy, and saw and heard more than people imagined ; he was a boy of very strong feelings, also, and he had conceived an affection for Beauchamp, which made anything that touched that gentleman a matter of deep interest to him. Thus, the first time he stopped, he repeated to himself the incantious words the lady had uttered, syllable for syllable. "He may have guests at

his marriage he does not expect!" said the boy, meditating. "She looked mighty fierce, too. I wonder what she meant? No good, I'm sure, by the way her eyes went."

He then walked on about half a mile further; and this time it was a narrow lane he halted in. "You see, our trout has bit at the fly;" repeated Billy Lamb, evidently showing that he heard a part, at least, of what had passed after he had left the garden; "that trout he talked of must be Mr. Beauchamp—that's to say the lord. I can't make it out. I'll tell Stephen: he seems to know a good deal about them all—or that good, kind Captain Hayward. He's a great friend of this lord's and will let him know; for they mean him harm, or I am mistaken."

When he reached Stephen Gimlet's cottage, however, and opened the door, he found the outer room only tenanted by the little boy, who was standing upon a stool, looking over the pages of a large old Bible, illustrated with some grotesque engravings, in which Adam and Eve, very naked indeed, the serpent, with a human head in large curls, very much like that of a Chancery barrister, the same personage, in the conventional form of satyr, together with a number of angels; and Noah's ark, with all its beasts, figured conspicuously.

In turning his head sharply round to see who it was that came in, the child let fall the leaves that were in his hand upon those opposite, and instantly out flew an old time-stained scrap of paper, which made a gyration in the air before it reached the floor. The boy instantly darted after it, and picked it up before Billy Lamb could see what it was. The pot-boy would have taken it out of his hand; but the other would not give it up, saying, with a screaming tone,—

"No, no, no!—it is granny's," And the same moment the voice of Widow Lamb was heard from the inner room, demanding,—

"Who have you got with you there, child?"

"It is I, mother," answered the deformed boy. "Is Stephen in? I want to speak with him."

"No, my poor William," answered the old lady, coming forth and embracing her son; "he has been out a long while."

"Then, is Captain Hayward upstairs?" asked the youth.

"He is out too," answered the widow. "He was out yesterday for the first time, and to-day we have had a grand party here—all the ladies in the carriage, and Mr. Beauchamp walking. Mrs. Clifford came so kindly to

ask after me! and so they persuaded Captain Hayward to go out with them—that is to say, Captain Hayward and Miss Mary, and Miss Slingsby with my Lord Lenham. They've gone all up to the hall; Mrs. Clifford in the carriage, and the rest on foot; and I should not wonder. Bill, if Captain Hayward did not come back here again."

"That is unfortunate!" exclaimed Billy Lamb; "I wanted so much to speak with him, or Stephen."

"Why, what is the matter, my dear boy?" said his mother; "if you will tell me what it is, I will let Stephen know when he comes back."

"Why, the matter is this, mother," answered the deformed boy. "Stephen was asking me a great deal, the other day, about the gentleman who has got the cottage of Chandleigh Heath, and what his name is. Now, I have found out his name, and it is Captain Moreton."

"Have nought to do with him, Bill!" cried the widow; "have nought to do with him; he is a base villain, and has ruined all who have had any connection with him."

"Why, I have had nought to do with him, mother," answered Billy Lamb, "but carrying him up his letters and newspapers; but I heard something there to-day which I thought Stephen might like to know; for I am sure he and the lady he has with him are plotting things to hurt this lord, who was so kind to poor Ste."

"Ha! what did you hear?" asked the old lady; "that concerns me more than Stephen, for I know more about that lady."

"She does not seem a very sweet one," answered the boy; "for when I told the Captain about Lord Lenham going to be married to Sir John's daughter, she looked as if she had a great inclination to scratch somebody's eyes out."

"Going to be married to Sir John's daughter!" exclaimed Widow Lamb. "Bill, are you sure that's true?"

"Quite sure. Haven't you heard of it?" said the boy. "All the people in Tarningham know it quite well; and a quantity of things are ordered."

Widow Lamb mused gravely for several minutes; and then shaking her head, said in a low voice, as if to herself: "I begin to understand. Well, what more did you hear, Billy?"

"Why, after a little talk," said the boy, "when they heard that the marriage was to be on Monday-week, the lady cried out, 'He will have guests at his wedding that he does not expect!' and her eyes looked just like two live

coals. She did not say much more ; for the captain tried to stop her : but, as soon as I had got through the garden-gate, I heard him laugh quite heartily, and say out loud, 'This is capital, Charlotte ; you see our trout has bit at the fly.' "

"And so they have been angling for him, have they ?" said Widow Lamb. "What more, my boy ?"

"Why, I did not like to stop and listen, mother," said the poor deformed boy ; "but I thought it could not be all right ; and therefore, I made up my mind that I would tell Stephen, or Captain Hayward, or somebody ; for that Mr. Beauchamp, who has turned out a lord, was always very kind to me when he was at the inn, and gave me many a shilling ; and I should not like them to do him any harm, if I can stop it ; and I could see they were wonderfully bitter against him, by the way of that lady and her husband."

"He is not her husband," said Widow Lamb, with a scoff ; "but that matters not, Bill ; you are a good boy, and have done quite right ; and perhaps it may save much mischief ; so that will be a comfort to you, my son. I'll tell Stephen all about it when he comes back ; and we'll talk the thing over together this very night, and see what can be done. It is strange, very strange, how things turn out in this world. Great people do not always know, when they do a kind action to poor people, and humble people like ourselves, that they may be helping those who will have the best means of helping them again. Now, from what you have told me, Bill, I may have the means of helping this good lord from getting himself into a terrible scrape. I am sure he does not know all, my boy ; I am sure a great number of things have been concealed from him ; and your telling me may set it all to rights."

"Well, that's pleasant," answered the deformed boy. "It makes one very lightsome, mother, to feel that one has been able to do anything to serve so good a gentleman ; and so I shall go home quite gay."

"That you may, Bill," replied his mother ; "but bring me up news of anything you may hear, for you can't tell what may be of consequence, and what may not."

The boy promised to obey, and went away whistling one of the peculiar melodies of which he was so fond ; in which, though the air was gay, there was ever an occasional tone of sadness, perhaps proceeding from a profound though concealed impression of his corporeal infirmities.

It was late in the evening before Stephen Gimlet re-

turned; but then Widow Lamb entered into instant consultation with him upon what she had heard; and their conference lasted far on into the night.

The next morning early, the gamekeeper got his breakfast, and then putting on his hat said—

"Now I'll go, Goody Lamb. I shall be very awkward about it, I dare say, but I don't mind; for he will find out in the end, that it is for his own good I talk to him about such disagreeable things. So, here goes!"

"You had better wait awhile, Stephen," said the widow, "most likely he is not up yet, for it is not seven o'clock."

"It will be well nigh eight before I am there," answered Stephen Gimlet; "and I can wait at the house till he is ready."

Thus saying, he walked away, and trudged on over the fields till he came into Tarningham Park, by the road which leads over the hill just above the house. He did not follow the carriage-drive, however, but took the shorter path through the chestnut trees, and in about ten minutes after entering the gates, saw the house. There was a travelling-carriage standing before the hall-door, which was at the distance of a quarter of a mile, and hardly had Stephen Gimlet's eyes rested on it for an instant, when a servant got up behind, and the post-boy laid his whip lightly over his horses. The carriage rolled on, and the gamekeeper followed it with his eyes with a feeling of misgiving; but he pursued his way to the house notwithstanding, and entering by the offices, asked the first servant he met, if he could speak for a moment with Lord Lenham.

"That you can't, Ste," answered the man, "for he has just gone off to London. He will not be down for a week either, they say; and then comes the wedding, my lad, so that you have a poor chance of talking with him till the honeymoon is over."

Stephen Gimlet looked down perplexed; and then, after a moment's thought, he said, "Ay, there is to be a wedding, is there? I heard something about it. He is a kind and good gentleman as ever lived, and I hope he may be very happy."

"I dare say he will now," said the footman, "for our young lady is fit to be the wife of a king, that she is. But as one marriage made him very unhappy for a long time, it is but fit that another should cure it."

"Then do you mean to say he has been married before?" asked the gamekeeper.

"Ay, that he has," replied the servant; "none of our

people, not even Sir John's gentleman, nor any one, knew a word about it till I found it out. I'll tell you how it was, Ste. 'The day before yesterday morning the butler says to me, 'I wish, Harrison, you'd just clear away the breakfast things, for I've got the gout in my hand'—he has always got the gout, you know, by drinking so much ale, besides wine. Well, when I went into the breakfast-room after they were all gone, I saw that the door into the library was a little ajar; but I took no notice, and Dr. Miles and Sir John went on talking there, and did not hear me at all in t'other room. I could not tell all they said; but I made out my Lord Lenham had been married a long time ago, but that the lady had turned out a bad un, and that they had lived apart for many years, till the other day my lord heard from Paris she was dead, and then he proposed to Miss Isabella. Dr. Miles said something about not hurrying the marriage, but the jolly old barrownight said that was all stuff, that he would have a wedding before a fortnight was over, and he'd broach two pipes of port and fuddle half the county."

"And when is it to be, then?" asked Stephen Gimlet; but the man's reply only confirmed what he had heard before, and with by no means a well-satisfied countenance the gamekeeper took his way across the park again, murmuring to himself as soon as he got out into the open air, "Goody Lamb was right! They've cheated him into believing she is dead. That is clear. There is some devilish foul work going on; and how to manage I don't know. At all events, I'll go back and talk to the old woman, for she has a mighty clear head of her own."

As he walked on, he saw our friend Ned Hayward strolling slowly along at a distance, and he felt a strong inclination to go up and tell him all he had been going to tell Beauchamp; but then he reflected that he had no right to divulge what he knew of the latter gentleman's secrets to another who might not be fully in his confidence. Besides, Ned Hayward was not alone. There was the flutter of a lady's garments beside him, and he seemed in earnest conversation with his fair companion. They were not indeed walking arm-in-arm together, but they were very close to one another, and as Stephen Gimlet paused, considering, he saw the lady's head frequently raised for a moment as if to look in her companion's face, and then bent down again as if gazing on the ground.

The gamekeeper judged from these indications that they were particularly engaged and would not like to be disturbed; and taking that with other motives for not going

near them, he walked back to his own cottage, where he found Widow Lamb with her large Bible open before her.

Gimlet's story was soon told, and his mother-in-law seemed as puzzled as he did for a time. He then suggested for her consideration whether it might not be as well to convey the intelligence they possessed to Captain Hayward or Sir John Slingsby; but Widow Lamb exclaimed, at once—

"No, Stephen—no! we might make mischief with the intention of doing good. We must wait. He will come back before the marriage-day, and you must see him then. I will go up with you and talk to him myself; for I have much to say that I will only say to himself."

"But suppose we should not be able to see him?" said Stephen Gimlet, "or if anything should prevent his coming till the very day."

"Then I suppose we must speak to some one else," replied his stepmother; "but do not be afraid, Stephen. Leave it all to me."

Stephen Gimlet was afraid, however; for he was one of those unfortunate eager people, who, when they take the interests of another to heart, are never satisfied till they see those interests perfectly secure. He had all his life, too, been accustomed to manage everything for himself, to rely upon no one, to trust to his own mind and his own exertions for the accomplishment of everything he desired. It is an unlucky habit, which makes people very uneasy when once they contract it, which trebles both their anxieties and their labours; for there is not above one-third, in ordinary circumstances, of anything that a man requires to do which can be done by his own hands, in the complicated state of society in which we live; but still Stephen Gimlet had that habit, and, like an old coachman, he was not easy when the reins were in the hands of another.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARY CLIFFORD and Ned Hayward were alone together; and now a word or two upon the frame of mind in which they met. Ned Hayward, since first we introduced him to our readers, had taken a great part in many things where Mary Clifford was concerned. He had first made her acquaintance in rescuing her gallantly from the brutal and shameless attempt to carry her off, of a man whom she detested. He had told her kindly and frankly of her uncle's embarrassed and dangerous situation. • He had,

without the slightest ostentation, offered the means of relieving him from the most pressing of his difficulties, and had gone up to London to accomplish what he offered, with a mixture of delicacy of feeling, and gay open-hearted readiness, which doubled the value of all he did. He had come down again, fought a duel with the man who had insulted her, received a severe wound, suffered, and put himself to great inconvenience; and then had been found prepared, at a moment of need, to redeem his given word in her uncle's behalf, without hesitation or reluctance, though evidently at a great sacrifice.

Nevertheless, all these things might have gone no further than the mind—even with a calm, gentle, feeling creature like herself. Gratitude, she could not have avoided entertaining, under such circumstances—respect, very high esteem; but she might have felt nothing beyond these three impressions, had that been all. There was a great deal more, however. Ned Hayward had disappointed all Mary Clifford's preconceived ideas of his character; and had gone on growing upon her regard every hour. She had found him thoughtful, where she had believed him to be heedless; feeling, where she had expected him to be selfish; full of deep emotions, where she had fancied him light; well-informed, and of cultivated tastes, instead of superficial and careless; and, being imperatively called upon to do him justice in her own heart, she went on, and did, perhaps, something more. But still, this was not all; he had first excited wonder, curiosity and pleasure, then, admiration and esteem, then, interest and sympathy. Tie all these up in a parcel, with gratitude for great services rendered, and a great number of musings regarding him in silence and in solitude, and what will be the result? Day by day, after the duel, she had thought of him—perhaps, I might have said, night after night. Then, when she had seen him again, and knew him to be ill and suffering, she had thought of him with deeper feelings still, and even oftener than before; and when at length he came over with reviving health, and took up his abode in the same house with herself, she found a number of new sensations blending in her meditations, and she fancied that she was studying his character all the while.

On the day of Beauchamp's departure for London, Ned Hayward rose early, breakfasted with his friend, saw him off, and then, according to the plan he had proposed, walked out into the fine sunny morning air, intending to spend the greater part of the summer day in some of the cool and more retired parts of the park.

It was, at least, two hours before the usual time of breakfast; he had not an idea that any of the family was up; and thus, pursuing one of the gravel walks away from the house, he went in among the chestnut-trees, and strolled on, fancying himself perfectly alone in the woods, when suddenly, in taking a turn, the path showed him the fair face and graceful form of Mary Clifford, advancing towards him, at the distance of about fifty or sixty paces. To avoid her, of course, was quite out of the question; but Ned Hayward resolved that he would only speak to her for a moment, and then go on. But, Heaven knows how it happened;—in about two minutes, he might be seen turning round with her; and their walk continued for nearly an hour and a half.

"Well, Miss Clifford," he said, with as gay a look as he could command, "Beauchamp is gone. Have you been taking a long walk?"

"No, not very far," answered Mary: "I saw some strange looking people crossing the park; and ever since that adventure which first made us acquainted with each other, I have become very cowardly. I therefore turned back; otherwise I should have much enjoyed a ramble, for I have a slight headache."

What could Ned Hayward do under such circumstances? He could not avoid offering to escort and protect Miss Clifford—he could not even hesitate to propose it. Mary did not refuse, but her "Yes" was timidly spoken; and, instead of turning back with Ned Hayward through the wild wood walks, she made him turn back with her, and led him to the more open parts of the park, where the house was generally in sight.

A momentary silence had fallen over both before they issued forth from under the chestnut trees; and each felt some awkwardness in breaking that silence—the surest possible sign of there being very strong feelings busy at the heart; but Mary felt that the longer the silence continued, the more awkward would it become, and the more clearly would it prove that she was thoughtful and embarrassed; and, therefore, she spoke at random, saying,—

"What a beautiful day it is for Lord Lenham's journey! I envy him the first twenty miles of his drive."

"I envy him in all things," answered Ned Hayward; "his life may, and, indeed, seems likely to be, made up of beautiful days; and I am very sure that mine is not."

"Nay, Captain Hayward," said Mary, raising her eyes gently to his face, and shaking her head with a smile,

"you are in low spirits and unwell, otherwise you would never take so bright a view of your friend's fate, and so dark a one of your own. Many a fair and beautiful day may be, and ought to be, in reserve for you. Indeed, they must be; for your own heart lays up, by the acts it prompts, a store of sunshine and brightness for the days to come."

"May it not rather lay up, by the feelings it experiences, a store of bitterness and sorrow, of clouds and darkness?" asked Ned Hayward, in a tone so different from that he commonly used, that Mary started, gazed for a moment at him, and then, letting her eyes fall again as they met his, first coloured slightly, and then turned pale. By the marks of emotion she displayed, Ned Hayward was led to believe that he had spoken too plainly of what he had never intended to touch upon at all; and he hastened to repair the error.

"What I mean is simply this, my dear Miss Clifford," he said; "a man who enjoys himself very much—as I do—feels pain in the same proportion, or perhaps more keenly. Every source of pleasure is an inlet to pain, and as we go on continually in this world, losing something dear to us, day by day, I am occasionally inclined to envy those cold phlegmatic gentlemen who, with a very tolerable store of pleasures, have few pains but corporeal ones. I never pretend to be a very sentimental person, or to have very fine feelings, or anything of that sort, but now, as an instance of what I was speaking of, I cannot think of quitting this beautiful spot, and all the friends who have shown me so much kindness, as I must do on Monday next, without a sort of sinking at the heart, which is very unpleasant."

"You do not mean to say you are going on Monday!" exclaimed Miss Clifford, pausing suddenly, with the colour varying in her cheek.

Ned Hayward was surprised and pleased; for there was no attempt to conceal that his staying or going was a matter of interest to her. He answered, however, gravely, even sadly,—

"I fear I must."

"But you have forgotten your promised visit to us at Hinton," said Mary, reproachfully, and deadly pale; "you promised to come, you know; I have counted upon that visit, as affording an opportunity of settling how and where, when I come of age—which will now be in a few months—the money you so generously lent me can be

repaid. Indeed," she added, earnestly, "you must come there for a few days, even if you do not stay here."

There was a tenderness, a tremulous softness in her tone, a slight, yet sufficiently marked agitation in her manner, which made Ned Hayward's heart beat.

"Can I be beloved?" he asked himself. "Can she return the feelings she has inspired? 'I will soon know!'" "My dear Miss Clifford," he replied, "I fear that visit would prove more dangerous to me than this has been; and therefore, however unwillingly—however great would have been the delight—I must decline it."

Mary Clifford looked down, without uttering a word; but her cheek remained pale, her lip quivered, as if she would fain have given voice to some reply; and though her arm was not in his, he could feel that she trembled. Ned Hayward's heart beat, too; but there was, as we have often seen before, a frankness, a straightforward simplicity in his habitual course of action, which overleaped many a difficulty that would have baffled other men.

"Let me explain," he said; but Mary made a slight motion with her hand, saying,—

"Oh, no, no!" in a faint tone, and then she repeated the word "dangerous!"

"Yes," he said, "more dangerous, Miss Clifford! Can you not conceive how and why? In a word, then, I cannot, and must not stay with you longer. I must, by as speedy a return as possible to other occupations, make an effort to forget that I have ever seen one, whom I fear I have already known too long, for the peace of my whole life."

He paused for a moment, with a sigh, raised his head high the next instant, and then added, "I have but one favour to ask you, which is this—not to let what I have just said make any difference in your demeanor towards me during the short period of my stay. I had no intention of troubling your ear with such things at all; but, your own question brought forth what I would willingly have concealed. Perhaps in this I have been wrong; but, believe me, I am very well aware that difference of fortune has placed a barrier between us which cannot be overleaped. This is the only favour, then, dear lady—do not alter towards me—let me see you ever the same as I have yet beheld you; and when I go away for ever, let me carry with me the remembrance of Mary Clifford as a picture of all that deserves love and admiration upon earth. Do not, do not change, notwithstanding my rash confessions."

Mary Clifford looked up in his face, and a varying light

played in her eyes, as if, at one moment, it was about to break forth sportively, and at another would have drowned itself out in tears.

"I must change, Hayward!" she said at length, with a bright smile upon her lip, "indeed you ask too much. How can you expect that I should live in the same house with you, and know that you love me, without showing in some degree what is passing in my own breast?"

"Mary! Mary! he exclaimed, laying his hand upon her arm, and gazing in her face, "you would not—oh, I am sure you would not trifle with me——"

"Not for the world," she answered. "I am incapable of trifling with any man; but with you, to whom I owe so much, it would be base indeed!"

"But the great disparity of fortune," said her lover, with the shade again upon his brow. "Oh, Mary, how can it ever be? You, I have heard, are wealthy—they call you 'the heiress'—and I know myself to be poor. Are you aware—surely I told you, that all I had saved out of the wreck of my father's fortune, only amounted at first to——"

"Will you pain me?—Do you wish to grieve me?" asked Mary Cliford, "if not, do not mention such matters as in any way likely to affect my feelings or conduct; and yet I do not wish you to consider me as a romantic girl, for I am not. I have always thought that a competence must be possessed to render the lives of any two people happy; but surely it matters not on whose side that competence comes. We shall have enough. Edward, for happiness, and though I know it would have been more pleasant to yourself if the greater part of our little fortune had been brought by yourself, yet I am very glad that I have it, as you have not."

"But your mother—your guardians, Mary?" said Ned Hayward, still in a doubtful tone.

Mary laughed, but with a slight touch of vexation in the tone, and she exclaimed—

"I do believe he will not have me, even when I have almost offered myself to him!"

But Ned Hayward would not lie under that imputation, and he cast his arms round his fair companion, assuring her that if she had the wealth of the world, the only position he would value would be herself.

Mary freed herself gently from his embrace; and suffering him to draw her arm through his, walked on with him till the breakfast hour was fully come.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALL was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park. Mary Clifford had assured Ned Hayward that her mother's consent would not only be given, but given cheerfully; that her guardians, whose period of rule was so nearly at an end, would raise no objection; and that all who loved her would be glad to see her the promised bride of one so well worthy of esteem. Nor was her promise unaccomplished; for good Mrs. Clifford was delighted. Ned Hayward had ever been a great favourite of hers since he had come to her rescue in Tarningham Lane. The guardians were quite quiescent, replying to the letter of announcement, that whatever Miss Clifford judged for her own happiness, and received her mother's consent, would receive their approbation. Sir John was in ecstacy, and Isabella, in the midst of her own happiness, felt happier still at that of her cousin. Daily letters were received from Beauchamp, all breathing joy and hope, and though lawyers were troublesome, and men of business dilatory, yet not one word was said, not one thought seemed to be entertained, of any real danger or difficulty.

All, then, was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park, and not one of its inmates had the slightest idea of the anxiety and alarm which were felt for them in a cottage not far off. Every morning and every evening, long consultations were held between Widow Lamb and her son-in-law, regarding the fate of Mr. Beauchamp, and just in proportion to their ignorance of the habits of the world were the difficulties that presented themselves to their imaginations. Stephen Gimlet was anxious to act in some direction. Mr. Beauchamp, as he still frequently called him, being absent, he thought it would be better to say all that they had to say, to Sir John Slingsby, or at all events to Captain Hayward; but, on the contrary, his mother-in-law, with longer experience, a disposition naturally timid and cautious, and upon the whole better judgment, insisted that it might be wrong or dangerous to do so.

"You cannot tell, Stephen," she said, "what this good young lord has told them, and what he has not. We cannot even be sure how this woman stands with him. He may have divorced her for aught we know. I am sure her conduct has always been bad enough; and if such

'should be the case, we might make the poor young lady unhappy when there is no need. Nobody even can guess at all the mischief that might happen. No, no: you watch closely for the young lord's coming back, and as soon as ever he is here, you and I will go up and speak to him. He must be back in time for that, and I dare say he will come on Saturday night, so there will be plenty of time."

It was one of Stephen Gimlet's maxims, and a very good one too, that "there never is plenty of time;" but he carried the matter somewhat too far, for he thought one could never do too much. Now that is a very great mistake; for in love, politics, and ambition, as in the roasting of a leg of mutton, you can remedy the meno, but you cannot remedy the plu. However, to make up for not doing what his mother-in-law would not let him do—and in regard to Beauchamp she had the whip hand of him, for she did not let him into all her secrets—he busied himself every spare moment that he had in watching the proceedings of Captain Moreton and the fair lady he had with him. His long familiarity with beasts and birds, greatly affected his views of all things, and he got to look upon these objects of his contemplation as two wild animals. He internally named one the fox and the other the kite, and with the same sort of shrewd speculation in regard to their manners, habits, and designs, as he employed upon brutes, he watched, and calculated, and divined with wonderful accuracy. One thing, however, he forgot, which was, that a human fox has a few more faculties than the mere brute; and that, although the four-legged fellow with the brush might require great caution in any examination of his habits and proceedings, Captain Moreton might require still more. Now that worthy gentleman very soon found out that there was an observant eye upon him, and he moreover discovered whose eye that was. There could not have been a more unpleasant sensation to Captain Moreton than to feel himself watched, especially by Stephen Gimlet; for he knew him to be keen, shrewd, active, decided, persevering, one not easily baffled, and by no means to be frightened; one who must be met, combated, overcome in anything he undertook, or else suffered to have his own way. Captain Moreton was puzzled how to act. To enter into open war with Stephen was likely to be a very dangerous affair; for the proceedings of the worthy Captain, as the reader may suppose, did not court public examination; and yet to suffer any man to become thoroughly acquainted with all his in-comings and out-goings, was very disagreeable and might be peril-

ous. To gain time, indeed, was the great thing; for Moreton's intention was, as soon as he had fairly seen his cousin married to Isabella Slingsby, to take his departure for another land, and to leave the consequences of the situation in which he had placed Lord Lenham to operate, as he thoroughly believed they would operate, in destroying health, vigour, and life. His only object in remaining at all was so to guide the proceedings of his fair companion, and to restrain her fiery and unreasoning passions, as to prevent her overthrowing his whole scheme by her intemperate haste. But how to gain the necessary time was the question. He first changed his haunts and his hours—went out on the other side of the heath; but Stephen Gimlet was there—took his walk in the early morning, instead of late in the evening; but the figure of Stephen Gimlet was seen in the gray twilight, whether it was day-dawn or sunset; and Captain Moreton became seriously uneasy.

Nothing, however, as yet appeared to have resulted from all this watching, till, on the Saturday morning, somewhat to Captain Moreton's surprise, the door of the room, where he was sitting alone, was opened, and in walked his friend and acquaintance, Harry Wittingham. The young man was exceedingly pale; but still he appeared to move freely and without pain or difficulty; and a look of real pleasure came up in Captain Moreton's face, which completely deceived Mr. Wittingham, junior, as to the sensations of his friend towards him. He fancied, as Captain Moreton shook him warmly by the hand, and declared he was delighted to see him well again, that the other was really glad at his recovery. Now, Harry Wittingham might have been wounded, sick, dying, dead, buried, turned into earth again, without Captain Moreton's caring one straw about him, simply as Harry Wittingham per se; but as one who might be serviceable in his schemes, who might help him out of a difficulty, and, by taking part in a load of danger, might aid Captain Moreton to bear the rest, he was an object of great interest to the Captain, who congratulated him again and again upon his recovered health, made him sit down, inquired particularly into all he had suffered, and did and said all those sorts of things which were most likely to make a man thus convalescent believe that a friendly heart had been greatly pained by all he had undergone.

Harry Wittingham was soon seated in an arm-chair, and making himself quite at home. Contrary to the advice of

"all doctors, he indulged in a glass of brandy-and-water at the early hour of half-past ten, and declared he was a great deal better for it, that old fool Slattery having kept him without wine, spirits, or porter for the last five weeks.

"Ay, that might be necessary some time ago," said Moreton, "till your wound was healed, but it is all stuff now. It must have been a bad wound that you have got, Harry; and I am devilish sorry I could neither be down myself nor send Woolstapler, for I think then you would have got no wound at all. However, you gave him as good as you got, and that was some consolation. No gentleman should ever be without his revenge. Whether it be with cards, or pistols, or what not, he should always give something for what he gets, and if he does that, he has every reason to be satisfied."

"I have not quite enough yet," said Harry Wittingham, with a significant nod of his head; "and some people shall find that, bye-and-bye."

"Ay, that's right, quite," answered Captain Moreton; "but I say, Hal, how is the old cock, your father? I heard yesterday he was breaking sadly—got the jaundice, or some devil of a thing like that—as yellow as one of the guineas he keeps locked up from you—time for him to take a journey, I should think."

For a minute or two Harry Wittingham made no reply, but then he set his teeth hard, and said,—

"I should not wonder if the hard-hearted old flint were to leave it all away from me."

Captain Moreton gave a long, low whistle, exclaiming, "Upon my life you must stop that. Hang me, if I would not pretend to be penitent, and play a good boy for a month or two!"

"It is of no use in the world," answered Harry Wittingham; "you might as well try to turn the Thames at Gravesend as to put him out of his course when once he has taken a thing into his head. He must do what he likes; he can't take it all, that's one comfort;—but, I say, Moreton, what the devil is that fellow Wolf hanging about here for? You had better not have anything to do with him, I can tell you? He is as great a scamp as ever lived, and I'll punish him some day or another. I should have come in yesterday, but I saw him sitting down there upon the mound upon the heath, looking straight here, and so I went away."

"Did you see him again to-day?" asked Captain Moreton, with very uneasy feelings.

"Oh, yes," answered Wittingham; "there he was, prowling about with his gun under his arm; but I doubled upon him this time, and went down the lanes, and in by the back way."

"I will make him pay for this," said Moreton, setting his teeth. "He has been spying here for a long time, and if it were not that I don't wish any fuss till the day after to-morrow is over, I would break every bone in his skin."

"It would be a good thing if you did," answered Harry Wittingham; "I'll tell you how he served me;" and he forthwith related all the circumstances of his somewhat unpleasant adventure with Stephen Gimlet when he visited the gamekeeper's cottage.

The moment he had done, Captain Moreton tapped him on the arm with a meaning smile, saying,—

"I'll tell you what, Harry, though you are not very strong yet, yet if you are up to giving me ever so little help, we'll punish that fellow before to-morrow's over. If you can come here to-night, and take a bed, we'll get up early and dodge him as he has been dodging us. He is always out and about before anybody else, so that there will be no one to help him, let him halloo as loud as he will. He is continually off Sir John's grounds with his gun and dog, so that we have every right to think he is poaching, as he used to do."

"Well, but what will you do with him?" said Harry Wittingham; "he is devilish strong, remember."

"Yes, but so am I," answered Captain Moreton; "and I will take him unawares, so that he cannot use his gun. Once down, I will keep him there, while you tie his arms, and then we will bundle him over here, and lock him up here for a day or two."

"Give him a precious good hiding," said young Wittingham, "for he well deserves it; but I don't see any use of keeping him. If we punish him well on the spot, that's enough."

"There's nothing that you or I can do," answered Captain Moreton, "that will punish him half so much as keeping him here till noon on Monday; for now I'll let you into one thing, Harry: I am looking out for my revenge upon some other friends of ours, and I have a notion this fellow is set to watch everything I do, with promise of devilish good pay, if he stops me from carrying out my plan. It will all be over before twelve o'clock on Monday; and if we can keep him shut up here till then, he will

lose his bribe, and I shall have vengeance. You can give him a good licking, too, if you like, and nobody can say anything about it, if we catch him off Sir John's grounds."

"I don't care whether they say anything about it or not," answered Harry Wittingham; "they may all go to the devil for that matter; and I'll lend a hand with all my heart. But remember, I'm devilish weak, and no match for him now; for this wound has taken every bit of strength out of me."

"Oh, you'll soon get that up again," answered Captain Moreton; "I'll manage all the rough work. But how do you get on about money, if the old fellow gives you none?"

"I should be devilish badly off, indeed," replied the young man, "if our old housekeeper did not help me; but she has taken her money out of the bank, and is selling some things for me; so that I must not forget to let her know that I am here, if I come to-night."

"Oh, I'll take care of that," answered Captain Moreton. "There's a boy brings up my letters and things—a quiet cunning little hump-backed devil, who whistles like a flageolet, and says very little to anybody. I'll tell him to go and tell old mother what's-her-name silyly, that you are here if she wants you."

The whole scheme seemed palatable to Harry Wittingham, and he entered into the details with great zest and spirit, proposing several improvements upon Captain Morton's plan, some of which suited that gentleman quite well. Another glass of brandy-and-water was added, and Harry Wittingham declared that it was better than all the doctor's stuff he had swallowed since he was wounded, for that he was already much better than when he came, and felt himself quite strong again. After an hour's rambling conversation upon all sorts of things, not very gentlemanly either in tone or matter, the two worthy confederates parted.

As the visitor took his way back to Buxton's Inn, he looked boldly round for Stephen Gimlet with a pleasant consciousness of coming vengeance; but the gamekeeper was not to be seen, and meditating the pleasant pastime laid out for the following day, Mr. Wittingham reached the inn, and ordered a very good dinner as a preparation. He felt a little feverish, it is true, but nevertheless he drank the bottle of stiff port which was placed on the table when dinner was served; and, elated with wine, set out as soon as it was dark to take part once more in one of those

schemes of evil which suited too well his rash and reckless disposition, little knowing that all the time he was the mere tool of another.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"WELL, doctor—well, doctor, what is the matter?" asked Sir John Slingsby, at the door of his own house, towards two o'clock on that Saturday afternoon; "you look warm, doctor, and not half as dry as usual. I declare, you have made that fat pony of yours perspire like an alderman at the Easter ball. What has put you into the saddle? Has the chaise broken down?"

"No, Sir John," answered Dr. Miles; "but the horse was sooner saddled than harnessed, and I wanted to see you in haste—where are you going now? for you are about to mount, I perceive."

"I am going down to set the fools at Tarningham to rights," answered Sir John Slingsby. "I hear that bilious old crow, Wittingham, and deaf old Mr. Stumpsforth, of Stumpington, have been sitting for these two or three hours at the justice-room getting up all sorts of vexatious cases with Wharton, to torment the poor people of the parish, and to put them in a devout frame of mind for their Sunday's duties; so I am going down to put my finger in the pie, and spoil the dish for them. Come along, doctor, and help, for you are a magistrate too, and a man who does not like to see his fellow-creatures maltreated. You can tell me what you want as we jog along."

"We shall be going exactly in the right direction," said Dr. Miles; "for my business with you referred to your magisterial capacity, Sir John."

The worthy baronet, who had his foot in the stirrup, raised himself into the saddle with wonderful agility, considering his size and his age; and, accompanied by Dr. Miles, was soon on his way towards Tarningham, listening with all his ears to the communication which the rector had to make.

"You must know, my good friend," said the doctor, "that some short time ago your gamekeeper, Stephen Gimlet, found in the little vicarage church at Moreton some one busily engaged, as it appeared, in the laudable task of altering the registers in the vestry. He looked him

safely in, but the culprit got out in the night ; and Gimlet communicated the fact to me. I would have spoken to you about it, but circumstances occurred at that time which might have rendered it unpleasant for you to deal with that business."

"I understand," said Sir John Slingsby, nodding his head significantly "who was the man?"

"Why, Gimlet asserts that it was no other than that worst of all bad fellows, Captain Moreton," replied Dr. Miles. "I examined the register, and found that an alteration had certainly been committed ; for the date of one of the insertions was advanced several years before those that followed, by skilfully changing a nought into a six. Under the circumstances, I thought it best to consult with Wittingham, and I proposed that a warrant should be issued against Captain Moreton ; but the worthy gentleman thought fit both to examine and cross-examine Gimlet in the first instance ; asked him nine times over if he would swear that it was Captain Moreton ; and, when he found that he had not seen the man's face, his back being turned to the door of the vestry when Gimlet went in, he pooh-poohed the whole matter, and refused to issue the warrant. I did not choose to do so myself, the event having occurred in a parish of my own, and with one of my registers ; but this morning, on visiting old Grindley, the sexton, who is very ill, he made a full confession of his part in the affair : Moreton had bribed him, it seems, to open for him the family vault and the door of the vestry. In the one the worthy captain altered the date on his great-grandfather's coffin from 1760 to 1766 by an instrument he seemed to have had made on purpose ; and in the vestry performed the same operation with plain pen and ink."

"A pretty scoundrel !" said Sir John Slingsby ; "but I know what he wants. He wants to prove that his mother could not break the entail, which would be the case if the old man had lived an hour after she was born."

"Precisely so," said Dr. Miles ; "but I did not choose to deal with Mr. Wittingham any more upon the subject, at least without your assistance ; and therefore, before I either signed a warrant myself, or spoke with the people at Tarningham about it, I thought it better to come up to the park and consult with you."

"As the wisest man in the county," said Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "My dear doctor, I will get a certificate from you and qualify for the university of Gotham.

But I will tell you what we will do, we will send the groom here for Stephen Gimlet, and his evidence, with the deposition of old Grindley, will soon put the whole matter right. Here, Tom, ride over like the devil to Ste Gimlet's cottage; tell him to come down as fast as his legs will carry him to the justice-room at Tarningham. We'll soon bring these gentlemen to the end of their law, and Wharton to boot—an ill-conditioned brute, a cross between a fox and a turnspit—do you recollect his mother, doctor? Her legs were just like the balustrades of a bridge, turned the wrong side upmost, only they bowed out on each side, which gave them a kind of ogce."

Thus rattling on, Sir John Slingsby rode forward till they reached the entrance of the little justice-room, which was conveniently situated close to Mr. Wharton's offices.

The appearance of Sir John Slingsby and Dr. Miles did not seem at all palatable to the two other magistrates and their clerk, if one might judge by the superlative courtesy of their reception. A chair was placed immediately for the reverend gentleman, Mr. Stumpforth vacated his seat for Sir John, as president of the magistrates, and Mr. Wharton, with malevolent sweetness, expressed his delight at seeing Sir John amongst them again.

"You did all you could to prevent it," said Sir John, taking the chair, "but it would not do, Wharton. Now, gentlemen, what are you about? we will not interrupt business."

"There are a good many cases down," said Mr. Wharton; "some of them excise-cases, some of them under the poor-law, some of them——"

"Well, let us get through them—let us get through them!" cried Sir John, interrupting him, "for we have business, too, which must be done."

"We must take things in their order," said Mr. Wittingham, drily.

"Oh, yes, according to the ledger," cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing; "everything in the regular way of trade, Wittingham, eh? Who is this? James Jackson, the publican," he continued, looking at the paper; "well, Wittingham, how does the debtor and creditor account stand with him?"

Mr. Wittingham winced, but replied nothing; and the case was regularly taken up. Some nine or ten others followed; and certainly everything was done by the two magistrates who had been found sitting, and their exceedingly excellent clerk, to tire out Sir John Slingsby and Dr.

Miles, by protracting the investigation as long as possible. The poor persons, however, who had been compelled by the power of paper or parchment to appear in the awful presence of justice, had reason to thank their stars, and did so most devoutly, that the number of magistrates was increased to four. Several cases were dismissed as frivolous; very lenient penalties were inflicted in other instances; and, if the real truth were told, the person who suffered the severest punishment under the proceedings of that day was no other than Mr. Wittingham, upon whom Sir John Slingsby continued to pour for two long hours all the stores of sarcasm which had accumulated in his bosom during the last fortnight. At length, the magistrates' paper was over, and worthy Mr. Wittingham showed an inclination to depart; but Sir John Slingsby stopped him, exclaiming,—

"Stay a bit, Wittingham—stay a bit, my good sir! The case with which we have now to deal you have already nibbled at; so you must have your share of it."

"I am ill, Sir John," said Mr. Wittingham; "I am not fit."

"Not fit, I have long known you to be," rejoined Sir John, and then added, in a murmur, "for anything but a tall stool at the back end of a slopseller's shop; but as to being ill, Wittingham—you don't pretend to be ill? Why your complexion is as ruddy as if you had washed your face with guineas out of your strong-box. However, it is this business of Captain Moreton and his falsification of the register at Moreton Church that we have to deal with."

"I have already disposed of that," said Mr. Wittingham, sharply; "I am not disposed to go into it again."

But it was now Mr. Wharton's turn to attack Mr. Wittingham.

"You have disposed of it, sir!" he exclaimed, with all the blood in his body rushing up into his face; "the falsification of the registers of Moreton Church! why, I never heard of this!"

"There was no reason that you should," answered Mr. Wittingham, tartly; "you are not a magistrate, I think, Mr. Wharton; and besides, you might, in some degree, be considered as a party interested. Besides, you were absent, and so I sent for Bacon, and dealt with the matter myself."

"Fried his bacon, and deviled the attorney," said Sir John Slingsby, with a roar; "you see, he is such an active

creature, Wharton, he must be doing, whether right or wrong. I declare he cuts out so much matter for the bench in reversing all his sage decrees, that the rest of the magistrates can scarcely manage it."

"I did not come here to be insulted, Sir John Slingsby," said Mr. Wittingham, the jaundiced yellow of his face gradually becoming of an olive green. "I did not come here to be insulted, and will not stay for such a purpose; I expect to be treated like a gentleman, sir."

"Wonderful are the expectations of man!" exclaimed the baronet; "just as much might a chimney-sweeper expect to be treated like an archbishop, because he wears black. But let us to business—let us to business: if we go on complimenting each other in this way, we shall not get through the affair to-night, especially with your lucid assistance, Wittingham; for if there be a man in England who can so stir a puddle that the sharpest eyes shall not be able to see a lost half-crown at the bottom, you are the man."

Up started the worthy magistrate, exclaiming in a weak voice and bewildered air,—

"I will not stay—that man will drive me mad!"

"Impossible," shouted Sir John Slingsby, as Mr. Wittingham staggered towards the door; and he then added, in a lower tone—"fools never go mad, they tell me;" but Dr. Miles, who saw that old Wittingham was really ill, rose from his seat, and, crossing the room, spoke a word or two to the retreating magistrate, which he was not allowed to finish, for old Wittingham pushed him rudely aside, and darted out of the room.

Before I proceed to give any account of the further inquiries of the three magistrates who remained, I shall beg leave to follow Mr. Wittingham to his own house. About two hundred yards' distance from the justice-room, he stopped, and leaned for a minute or two against a post, and again paused at his own gate, as if hardly able to proceed. He reached his dwelling, however, and after several attempts with a shaking hand, succeeded in thrusting his private key into the lock, and opening the door. The hall was vacant; the whole house still; there was neither wife nor child to receive and welcome him; no kindred affection, no friendly greeting to soothe and cheer the sick old man, whose pursuits, whose hopes, whose tendencies through life had been totally apart from the kindly sympathies of our nature. But there are times—steel the heart how we may—when a yearning for those very kindly

sympathies will come over us; when the strong frame broken, the eager energies quelled, the fierce passions dead and still within us, the vehement desires either disappointed or sated, leave us alone in our weakness, to feel with bitter regret that there are better things and more enduring than those which we have pursued; and when the great moral lessons, taught by decay, are heard and listened to for the first time, perhaps too late to practise them. That lonely house, that silent hall, the absence of every trace of warm life and pleasant social companionship, the dull, dead stillness that pervaded everything, had their effect upon Mr. Wittingham, and a sad effect it was. All was so quiet and so still; all was so solemn and so voiceless; he felt as if he were entering his tomb. The very sunshine, the bright sunshine that, streaming through the fanlight over the door, fell in long rays upon the marble floor, had something melancholy in it, and he thought—"It will soon shine so upon my grave." What was to him, then, the satisfaction of the greedy love of gold, that creeping ivy of the heart, which slowly growing, day by day, chokes every softer and gentler offspring of that on which it rests? What was to him the gratification of that vanity, which was all that the acquisition of wealth had satisfied? Nothing!—all nothing. He stood there friendless, childless, companionless, alone; sick at heart, disappointed in all those expectations he had formed, having reaped bitterness from the very success of his labours, and finding no medicine either for the heart or the body in the gold he had accumulated or the station he had gained.

He paused there for a moment, whilst the deep and bitter anguish of the regret of a whole life took possession of him, and then staggering on into the trim, well-arranged, cold and orderly library, he sunk into one of the arm-chairs by the side of the fireless hearth, and rang the bell sharply. For two or three minutes no one appeared, and then he rang again, saying to himself,—

"There never were such bad servants as mine; ay, ay, it wants a mistress of a house:" and he rang again furiously.

In about a minute after the door opened, and Mrs. Biliter appeared; and Mr. Wittingham inquired, angrily, why nobody came at his summons? The housekeeper replied,—

"That she thought the footman had come, but finding the bell ring again, she had hastened up herself."

Mr. Wittingham's rage was then turned upon the foot-

man, and after denouncing him in very vehement terms, and condemning him to expulsion from his household, his anger either worked itself off, or his strength became exhausted, and he sat for a moment or two in silence, till Mrs. Billiter quietly began to move towards the door.

"Stay, Billiter," he cried; "what are you going for? I tell you I am ill, woman, very ill."

"I was going to send for Mr. Slattery," said Billiter, in a cold tone; "I saw you were ill, sir."

"Send for the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham; "that fellow Slattery is no good at all. Here have I been taking his soap-pills and his cordial-boluses for these three weeks, and am no better, but rather worse. I will go to bed, Billiter—get me a cup of hot coffee—I feel very ill indeed."

"You had better see some one," said Mrs. Billiter, "for you don't look right at all, and it would take some hours to get another doctor."

"Well, well, send for the man, if it must be so," said Mr. Wittingham, "but he does nothing but cram one with potions and pills just to make up a long bill. Here, help me up stairs, I will go to bed; and bring me a cup of strong coffee—I declare I can scarcely stand."

As soon as Mr. Wittingham was safely deposited in his room, Mrs. Billiter descended to the kitchen, and sent the housemaid at once for Mr. Slattery, taking care to spend as much time as possible on the preparation of the coffee, not judging it by any means a good beverage for her master, in which she was, probably, right. The surgeon, however, was so long ere he appeared, that she was obliged to carry up the coffee to Mr. Wittingham, whom she found retching violently, and complaining of violent pains. He nevertheless drank the coffee to the last drop, in the more haste as Mrs. Billiter expressed an opinion it would do him harm; after having accomplished which, he sank back upon his pillow exhausted, and closed his eyes. The colour of his skin was now a shade of deep green, approaching to black under his eyes, and the housekeeper, as she stood by his bedside and gazed at him, said to herself that it would not last long. It must not be pretended that she was in any degree greatly affected at the prospect of her master's speedy demise, though she had lived in his service very many years, for he was not one to conciliate affection in any one, and her meditations were more of how she could best serve the graceless lad, whose disposi-

tion she had assisted to ruin, than of his father's probable fate.

While she thus paused and reflected, the quick, creaky step of Mr. Slattery was on the stairs; and the moment after, he entered the room. He had always a cheerful air, Mr. Slattery, for he fancied it comforted his patients, kept up their spirits, and prevented them from sending for other advice. Thus he would stand and smile upon a dying man, as if he had a real and sincere pleasure in his friend's exit from a world of woe; and very few people could discover from the worthy gentleman's countenance whether a relation was advancing quietly towards recovery or the tomb. Thus, with a jaunty step, he approached Mr. Wittingham's bedside, sat down, and as the sick man opened his eyes, laughed benignantly, saying,—

"Why, my dear sir, what is all this? You must have been agitating yourself;" and at the same time he put his fingers on the pulse.

"Agitating myself!" cried Mr. Wittingham, "it is that old bankrupt brute, Sir John Slingsby, has nearly driven me mad; and I believe these servants will finish it. Why the devil do you leave my wig there, Billiter? Put it upon the block; don't you see Mr. Slattery is sitting upon it?"

"Well, I declare!" cried the surgeon, "I thought I felt as if I were sitting upon a cat or something of that kind. But, my dear sir, you must really keep yourself quiet, or you will bring yourself into a feverish state. The pulse is hard and quick now, and your skin is very hot and dry. We must make a little addition to the soap-pill, and I will send you directly a stomachic cordial-draught, combined with a little narcotic, to produce comfortable sleep."

He still kept his fingers on the pulse, gazing into the sick man's eyes, till Mr. Wittingham could have boxed his ears, and at length he added,—

"The draught must be repeated every two hours if you do not sleep, so that you had better have somebody sit up with you to give it you."

"I will have no such thing," said Mr. Wittingham; "I can't bear to have people pottering about in my room all night. I can take the draughts very well myself, if they are put down by me."

"But they must be shaken before taken," said Mr. Slattery.

"Well, then, I can shake them," said Mr. Wittingham; and the worthy surgeon, finding his patient obstinate, gave

up the point. The housekeeper followed Mr. Slattery out of the room, but did not think fit to make any observation till they reached the foot of the stairs, when she touched Mr. Slattery gently on the arm and beckoned him into the dining-room. "He seems in a bad way, sir," said the housekeeper.

"A case of jaundice, Mrs. Billiter," replied the surgeon, raising his eyebrows, "which is never very pleasant."

"But I want to know if there is any danger, Mr. Slattery," continued Mrs. Billiter; "it is very necessary that people should be aware."

"Why, there is always danger in every disease," answered the surgeon, who abominated a straightforward answer to such questions.

"I wish he would see his son," said Mrs. Billiter; "but you told him he would be better to-morrow or the next day, and so there is no hope of it; for, unless he is frightened out of his wits, he would fly into a fury at the very name of the thing."

"Well, wait till to-morrow," said Mr. Slattery, "and if I find that it won't hurt him, I will frighten him a bit. I don't see that there is any danger just at present, if he keeps himself quiet; and he must not be irritated on any account. However, if I were you, I would be ready to go to him directly, if he rings his bell; and in the meantime I'll send him the composing draught."

Notwithstanding Mr. Slattery's composing draughts, Mr. Wittingham passed a wretched night. He was feverish, heated, full of dark and horrible fancies, hearing the blood going in his head like a mill, and thinking of everything that was miserable within the whole range of a not very extensive imagination. He bore it obstinately for some hours, taking the potions by his bedside, within even less than the prescribed intervals, but finding no relief. At length, he began to wonder if people would hear him when he rang. He found himself growing weaker and more weak; and he suffered exceeding pain, till darkness, and the torture of his own thoughts, became intolerable; and, stretching out his hand, he rang the bell, about three o'clock in the morning. The old housekeeper, who had remained dressed close at hand, was in the room in a moment; and Mr. Wittingham felt as much pleased and grateful as it was in his nature to feel. She did her best to soothe and comfort him; and, just as the light was coming in, the sedative medicines which he had taken began to produce some effect, and he fell into a heavy sleep. Nevertheless,

when Mr. Slattery visited him, he found no great improvement ; but a warm bath produced some relief. The worthy surgeon began to fancy, however, from all the symptoms which he saw, that he was likely to lose a patient of some importance ; and he judged that it might be as well to establish a claim upon that patient's successor. He therefore determined to take the advocacy of Harry Wittingham's cause upon himself ; and, in order to prepare the way for what he had to say in the evening, he gave the worthy gentleman under his hands a significant hint that he was in a good deal of danger.

Mr. Wittingham heard the announcement in silence, closed his eyes, compressed his lips, and seemed more terribly affected than the worthy surgeon had at all expected. He therefore judged it best to throw in a little consolation before he proceeded further, and he continued, in a soothing and cajoling tone,—

"I know you to be a man of strong mind, my dear sir, and not likely to be depressed at the thought of a little peril. Therefore, if I had thought the case hopeless, I should have told you so at once. It is not so, however, at all ; and I only wish to warn you that there was some danger, in order to show you the necessity of keeping yourself quite quiet, and taking great care."

Mr. Wittingham answered not a word ; and, after a very unpleasant pause, the surgeon took his leave, promising to come again in the evening.

When he did return, Mr. Slattery found his patient wonderfully composed, as he thought. Nevertheless, there was an awkward something about the pulse, a sort of heavy, suppressed jar, which did not make him augur very favourably of his prospects. As he sat by the bedside, with his fingers upon the wrist, and his eyes half shut, as if considering all the slightest indications which might be afforded by that small agitated current, which beat and quivered beneath his touch, what was Mr. Slattery reflecting upon ? Not Mr. Wittingham's state, except as far as it was to influence his conduct in a non-medical capacity. He said to himself—or thought, which is the same thing—"This old gentleman will go. He has not stamina to struggle with such a disease. As I can do little for the Wittingham present, I may as well do what I can for the Wittingham to come."

Mrs. Billiter, however, did not happen to be in the room at the moment, and Mr. Slattery resolved to have a witness to his benevolent proceedings. He therefore asked numerous questions, and discussed various important points

affecting the sick man's health, till the good housekeeper appeared. He then gradually led the conversation round to young Harry Wittingham, remarking that he had had a long drive since the morning, and speaking of Buxton's Inn as one of the places at which he had called.

"By the way, I did not see your son, my dear sir," he added; "he was out. Indeed, he may be considered as quite well now, and only requires care of himself, kind attention from others, and a mind quiet and at ease."

Mr. Wittingham said not a word, and Mr. Slattery mistook his silence entirely. "I now think, my dear sir," he continued, "that it would be a great comfort to you if you would have him home. Under present circumstances it would be advisable, I think—I do, indeed."

Then the storm burst, then the smothered rage broke forth with fearful violence. I will not repeat all Mr. Wittingham said, for a great deal was unfit for repetition. He cursed, he swore, he gave Mr. Slattery over to perdition; he declared he would never let his son darken his doors again, that he had cast him off, disinherited him, trusted he might come to beg his bread. He told the surgeon to get out of his house, and never to let him see him again; he vowed that he was glad he was dying, for then that scoundrel, his son, would soon find out what it was to offend a father, and would understand that he could not make his peace whenever he pleased by sending any pitiful little pimping apothecary to try and frighten him into forgiveness. In vain Mr. Slattery strove to speak, in vain he endeavoured to excuse himself, in vain he took a tone of authority, and told his patient he would kill himself, if he gave way to such frantic rage. Again and again Mr. Wittingham, sitting bolt upright in bed, with a face black and green with warmth and jaundice, told him to get out of the house, to quit the room, to close the books, and strike a balance; and at length the surgeon was fairly driven forth, remonstrating and protesting, unheard amidst the storm of his patient's words.

Mrs. Billiter did not think fit to follow him; for she knew her master well, and that his ever-ready suspicions would be excited by the least sign of collusion. Besides, she was not altogether well pleased that Mr. Slattery had thought fit to take the business out of her hands without consulting her, and had thus made, as she termed it, a fine kettle of fish of the whole affair. Thus she acted perfectly honestly, when Mr. Wittingham turned upon her as soon as the surgeon was gone, exclaiming,—

"What do you think of all this, woman? What do you think of his impertinence?"

And she replied, "I think him a meddling little fool, sir."

"Ay, that he is, Billiter!" answered Mr. Wittingham; "and I believe he has tried to frighten me, just to serve his own purposes. But he shall find himself mistaken. He has done me harm enough though—putting me in such a passion. My head aches as if it would split;" and Mr. Wittingham pressed his hand upon his forehead, and sunk back upon his pillow.

By this time night was falling fast, and Mrs. Billiter retired to obtain lights; when she returned, Mr. Wittingham seemed dozing—exhausted, as she thought, by the fit of passion to which he had given way. Sitting down, therefore, at a distance, she took up a book and began to read. It was one of those strange, mystical compositions, the product of a fanatical spirit carried away into wild and daring theories regarding things wisely hidden from the eyes of man, in which, sometimes, by one of the strange contrarieties of human nature, the most selfish, material, and unintellectual persons take great delight. It was called the "Invisible World Displayed," and it had been lately bought by Mr. Wittingham, since he had fallen into the melancholy and desponding state which usually accompanies the disease he laboured under. For more than an hour Mrs. Billiter went on reading of ghosts, and spirits, and phantoms, and devils, till her hair began to stand erect under her thick cushion-cap. But still there was a sort of fascination about the book which carried her on. She heard her master breathing hard close by; and more than once she said to herself, "He's getting a good sleep now, at all events." At length she began to think the sleep lasted somewhat long; and, laying down the book, she went and looked in between the curtains. He had not moved at all, and was snoring aloud; so, as the clock had struck eleven, she thought she might as well send the other servants to bed, resolving to sit up in his room and sleep in the great chair. About a quarter of an hour was occupied in this proceeding, and in getting some refreshment; and when she returned, opening the door gently, she heard the same sonorous breathing; and, seating herself again, she took up the book once more, thinking: "I dare say he will wake soon; so I had better not go to sleep ere I have given him the other draught."

Wonderful were the tales that she there read—of people

possessed of miraculous warnings, and of voices heard, and of apparitions seen in the dead hour of night. Tarningham clock struck twelve whilst she was still poring over the pages; but though she was a good deal excited by what she read, fatigue and watching would have their effect; and her eyes became somewhat heavy. To cast off this drowsiness, she rose and quietly put the room in order; then sat down again, and had her hand once more upon the book, when suddenly the heavy breathing stopped for a minute. "He is going to wake now," said Mrs. Billiter to herself; but scarcely had the thought passed through her mind, when she heard a sudden sort of rattling and snorting noise from the bed; and, jumping up in alarm, she ran forward, and drew back the curtain. The light fell straight upon the face of the sick man; and a horrible sight it presented. The features were all in motion; the eyes rolling in the head; the teeth gnashing together; foam issuing from the mouth; and the whole limbs agitated, so that the bed-clothes were drawn into a knot around him. Mr. Wittingham, in short, was in strong convulsions.

Mrs. Billiter was, naturally, greatly alarmed; and her first impulse was to run to the door to call for help; but suddenly a new view of the case seemed to strike her: "No, I won't," she said; and, going back, she got some hartshorn, and applied it to Mr. Wittingham's nostrils, sprinkled some water on his face, wetted his temples, and did everything she could think of to put an end to the fit. It continued violently for several minutes, however; and she thought, "Perhaps he ought to be bled; I ought to send for Slattery, I do believe; but at that moment the spasm seemed relaxed; the contorted limbs fell languid; a calm expression spread over the features; the eyelids fell heavily, rose, and fell again; and though the fingers continued to grasp the bed-clothes, it was with no violence. "He is getting better," said the housekeeper to herself. The next moment the motions of the hand ceased; a sharp shudder passed over the whole frame; the chest heaved and fell; then came a deep sigh; and the eyes opened; the jaw dropped; all became motionless: there was not a sound.

Mrs. Billiter listened. Not the rustle of the lightest breath could be heard. She held the candle close to his eyes; the eyelids quivered not; the pupil did not contract. A cold, damp dew stood upon the sunken temples; and all was still, but it was the stillness of death.

The housekeeper set down the candle on the chair, and gazed at him for two or three minutes, almost as motionless as the dead body before her; then, suddenly starting, she said in a low tone: "There is no time to be lost; I must think of the poor boy; for he was a hard-hearted old man, and there is no knowing what he may have done. She pressed her hand upon her forehead tightly for a minute or two, in deep thought; then putting the candle on the table at a distance from the bed-curtains, she went out, ran up stairs, and called up the footman, waiting at his door till he came out.

"Master is very ill, John," said Mrs. Billiter; "I don't think he will get through the night, so you must run up——"

"And bring down Mr. Slattery," said the footman, interrupting her.

"No," answered the housekeeper; "Slattery said he could do no good, and master and he had a sad quarrel; but you must go and call Mr. Harry. Tell him to come down directly, and not to lose a minute."

"I had better take the horse," said the man, "for Buxton's Inn is a good bit of way."

"He is not at Buxton's Inn," answered Mrs. Billiter; "but at Morris's little cottage on Chandleigh Heath. You can take the horse if you like, but be quick about it for Heaven's sake. It is a clear, moonlight night, and you can gallop all the way."

Without calling any one else, Mrs. Billiter returned to the chamber of death, looked into the bed for a moment or two, and saw that all was still. She knew he was dead right well; but yet it seemed strange to her that he had not moved. There was something awful in it, and she sat down upon a chair and wept. She had not loved him; she had not esteemed or respected him; she had known him to be harsh, cruel, and unkind, but yet there was something in seeing the life of the old man go out, solitary, untended by kindred hands, without a friend, without a relation near; with bitterness in his spirit, and enmity between him and his only child, that moved the secret sources of deep emotion in the woman's heart, and opened the fountain of tears.

While she yet wept, she heard the horse's feet pass by towards Chandleigh Heath, and then for about an hour all was silent. Buried in deep sleep, the inhabitants of the little town knew not, cared not, thought not, of all that was passing in the dwelling of their rich neighbour. At

length a distant sound was heard of hoofs beating fast the hard road; it came nearer and nearer; and starting up, Mrs. Billiter ran down stairs with a light in her hand, and opened the hall-door. The next moment she heard the garden-gate opened, and a figure came forward leading a horse.

Casting the rein over the beast's neck, and giving it a cut with the whip to send it towards the stables, Harry Wittingham sprang forward, ran up the steps, and entered the house. His face was not pale but flushed, and his eyes fiery.

"Ah, Master Harry," said Mrs. Billiter, as soon as she saw him, "he is gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Harry Wittingham; "do you mean he is dead."

"Yes," answered the old woman; "but come up, sir—come up, there is much to be thought of."

Without a word, the young man stood beside her, whilst she closed and locked the door, and then followed her up stairs to his dead father's room. She suffered him to gaze into the bed for a minute or two, with haggard eyes and heavy brow, but then she touched his arm, saying,—

"Master Harry, Master Harry, you had better think of other things just now. He was very hard upon you, and I can't help thinking tried to do you wrong. Four or five days ago he wrote a great deal one afternoon, and then told me afterwards 'he had remembered me in his will.' You had better see what that will is—he kept all the papers he cared most about in that table drawer—the key hangs upon his watch-chain."

With shaking hands Harry Wittingham took up the watch, approached the table and opened the drawer with the key. There were several papers within and different note-books, but one document lay at the top with a few words written on the outside, and the young man instantly took it up, opened and began to read it, Mrs. Billiter gazed at him, standing at a distance, with a look of anxiety and apprehension. When he had read about a dozen lines, his face assumed a look of terrible distress: he dropped the paper from his hand, and sinking into a chair exclaimed,—

"Good God! he thought I shot at him!"

"But you didn't?—you didn't, Master Harry?"

"I?—I never thought of it!" exclaimed Harry Wittingham.

Mrs. Billiter ran forward, picked up the paper, and put it into his hand again.

"There's a large fire in the kitchen to keep water hot," she said in a low whisper; "all the maids are in bed, and the man has not come back yet, but he won't be long; be quick, Master Harry, be quick."

The young man paused, gazed thoughtfully at the paper for a moment or two, then took up the light and hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STEPHEN and his mother-in-law had risen betimes; and the boy was still sleeping in his bed. The old lady spent three-quarters of an hour in writing an epistle, with her spectacles on her nose; while her son-in-law ate his breakfast; and when the act of composition was over, she folded up in the letter an old piece of paper, partly printed, partly written, the very same, in fact, which had flown out of her family Bible one morning, when poor Billy Lamb, coming in, had found the book in the hands of Stephen Gimlet's little boy. She then added thereto an old, somewhat crumpled, and well-worn letter, first reading over the address attentively, got a light and a small piece of red sealing-wax, sealed the letter, and stamped it with the end of her thimble,

"There, Stephen," she said, giving the letter to her son-in-law: "he is back now that's certain; take that up to him, and tell him, that if he wants to hear any more about it, I can give him information of the whole. I know all the names, and I believe the minister is alive still. I would not go out of the house, if I were you, till I saw him; and, if by any chance he should not be come down yet, I would hang about and catch him, when he arrives; for it is only just right he should know how the whole matter stands before he goes any further."

"I won't miss him this time, Goody," said Ste Gimlet; "so you and the boy get your dinner, if I should not come back in time. I am very uneasy at its not having been done before; for we poor people cannot tell what may come of such things with great folks, and after all you tell me, I am very sure that blackguard fellow, Moreton, is not hanging about here for any good."

Thus saying, Stephen Gimlet put the letter carefully up,

and went away, as usual, with his gun in his hand, and his dog following. It was not yet more than half-past five o'clock; and, recollecting that the servants of Sir John Slingsby were not very matutinal in their habits, the gamekeeper thought he might as well go upon one of his rounds, which led him near to Chandleigh Heath, and see if he could get any inkling of Captain Moreton's proceedings. He walked slowly along up the lane from his own house, crossed the high-road from Tarningham to London, and then taking a path across the fields, soon came to another lane, which led him to a sandy way, having a high hedge with elm-trees on the left, and Chandleigh Heath on the right. It was sunk down some way beneath the rest of the country, so as to give no prospect over the common; but, a couple of hundred yards further on, a footpath went up over the bank, and divided into two, something after the fashion of a bird's merrythought, one branch leading to an old tumulus, and the other, which was much shorter, running down to the cottage inhabited by Captain Moreton. About twenty yards before he reached this turning, the dog, which followed at Stephen Gimlet's heels, began to growl in a somewhat angry manner; and the gamekeeper turned round to look in what direction the beast's eyes were bent. Before he could ascertain what was the matter, however, a man suddenly sprang over the hedge, and cast himself upon him, seizing the barrel of his gun with both hands.

A fierce struggle ensued; for Stephen Gimlet at once perceived who his adversary was; and the gamekeeper, though taken unawares, was decidedly getting the better, when he suddenly found his arms seized from behind, and a cord passed quickly round them. The next instant the cord was drawn tight, in spite of all his efforts; but at the same moment he had the satisfaction of hearing the voice of Harry Wittingham exclaim, "Damn the dog! he has bit me to the bone!" and, as his legs were free, he made so strenuous an application of his thick-nailed shoes to the ships of Captain Moreton, that the respectable gentleman let go his hold; and, darting away, Stephen Gimlet ran forward, as fast as he could, in the hope of meeting some one who would render him assistance. I have said that his assailants sprang upon him from behind; and, consequently, the only paths open for the fugitive were those which led towards the cottage or to the tumulus on the heath. In the latter direction he was not likely to find any one to help him; but down the lane, which passed close by the

cottage, were a number of poor men's houses, the inhabitants of which usually went out to work about that hour. It is a pity that Stephen Gimlet did not recollect that it was Sunday: but so it was; and the good labourers were taking an additional nap to refresh them after the toils of the week.

No one knows how much one limb aids another, even in the peculiar functions of the latter, till some deprivation has taken place. Now, at the first consideration, we should say, that a man did not run with his arms; but yet the arms help a man very much in running; and Stephen Gimlet soon found, to his cost, that he could not run as he was accustomed to do, without them. He was much swifter of foot than either of those who followed; but yet, by the time that he had got three hundred yards down the lane, they had recovered their hold of him, and thrown him down. In fact, it was a great convenience to them that he had run, for every step that he had taken was in the direction which they had intended to carry him; and when they overtook him, he was not thirty yards from the garden-gate of the cottage. He was easily dragged along for that distance, brought into the house, and put into a room which had been constructed by the retired hosier for what he called the butler's pantry, though it is by no means to be understood that he ever had, or expected to have, such a thing as a butler, or anything the least like it. Nevertheless, as the room was destined to contain a certain amount of silver spoons, tea-pots, and other little pieces of the precious metal, strong bars had been put up to the windows; and the butler's pantry now formed a very convenient little cage for the bird which the two gentlemen had caught out upon the common.

Before they shut the door upon him, Mr. Henry Wittingham made some proposal to Captain Moreton, in a low voice, to which the other replied,—

"No, no; he'll make an outcry and wake the women; and then we shall have it all over the place. You can lick him well before we let him out, if you like. Let us attend to the main business first, and, having got him in, keep him in; nobody knowing anything about it.—Good morning, Master Wolf; you shall have some bread-and-water, if you like, but nothing else for the next four-and-twenty hours."

"Stephen Gimlet answered not; and it is to be remarked, that—whether he thought that shouting would be of no use, or that he chose to imitate the beast whose name he

had acquired, in its taciturn habits under adversity—no word had he uttered from the beginning of the fray until the end. He suffered the door to be shut upon him in silence; and while he remained revolving what was to be done, or whether anything could be done, his two captors retired to the little drawing-room, where they sat down and laughed for a moment at the success of their scheme. Their first merriment, however, soon gave way to some uneasy sensations. Captain Moreton rubbed his shins, which had suffered considerably from the contact with Stephen Gimlet's shoes. Harry Wittingham unceremoniously pulled off his boot, and found his whole stocking stained with blood, and the marks of four large fangs very apparent in the heel and tendon.

"Come along with me," said Captain Moreton, when he saw his companion's state; "we'll get a little salt-and-water; you shall wash your heel with it, and I will wash my shins, for that d—d fellow has kicked all the skin off; salt-and-water is the best thing in the world."

While they go to perform the part of surgeons upon themselves, I will, with the reader's leave, return to speak of one of the actors in the scene of Stephen Gimlet's capture, who has not had as much notice as he deserves. The dog, who had followed from his own cottage, after having paid due attention to the heel of Mr. Wittingham, and received a severe kick for his pains, gave chase to the pursuers of his master down the lane, tore Captain Moreton's coat with a spring and a snap; but then suddenly, as if he saw that his own unassisted efforts could do little, and judged that it might be right to seek assistance, darted off at a right angle across the common, with his head hanging down, his tongue out, and some angry foam dropping from his mouth. He ran straight through a farm-yard on the opposite side of the heath, bit at a woman who was going to milk the cows, but only tore her apron, wounded the farmer's dog with a sharp snap, went clear over the wall, and straight on toward Tarningham, biting at every living thing that came in his way, but never stopping to ascertain whether he had inflicted much or little evil. This misanthropical spirit soon called the attention of people, and excited their indignation. They gave the poor dog a bad name; and, though no one could be found to undertake the exact task of hanging him, they followed with pitchforks, sticks, shovels, stones, and a very miscellaneous assortment of other weapons, such as pokers, tongs, &c.; and, driving him into the court-yard of the

mayor's house at Tarningham, succeeded in killing him, before he had done any further mischief.

Such is the tragic history of Stephen Gimlet's poor dog; but of none of the particulars were Captain Moreton and Harry Wittingham made acquainted at the time; for both those gentlemen thought fit to keep themselves strictly to the house during the whole morning. Of much and many things did they talk; they comforted the outward man as had been proposed, with salt-and-water; they comforted the inner man with toast, coffee, eggs, and broiled ham. The broiled ham left them thirsty; and at twelve o'clock they tried to assuage such unpleasant sensations by a glass of cold brandy-and-water; and finding that not succeed according to their expectation, they tried another glass hot. After that, Harry Wittingham declared he felt tired and sleepy with getting up so early, and retired to lie down for a time. He continued sleeping, in a broken sort of confused slumber, for between three and four hours, when he was roused by hearing some very high tones, and apparently sharp words, proceeding from the neighbouring room. Without difficulty he recognised the voices of Captain Moreton and his fair companion, who had seemed in no very good humour when she supped with them the night before; but he could not distinguish the subject of dispute on the present occasion, and, looking at his watch, he found that it was past four o'clock. Knowing that the dinner-hour at the cottage was five, he washed his face and hands, arranged his hair as best he might, and went down to the drawing-room, still hearing the strife of tongues raging in the adjoining room.

It was some quarter of an hour before Captain Moreton joined him; and he was then informed by his worthy friend that dinner would be half an hour later that day, as the maid had been sent to Buxton's Inn, for the purpose of ordering a chaise to be at the door at nightfall.

This announcement startled Harry Wittingham a good deal.

"But where the devil are you going to, Moreton?" he inquired; "you are not going to leave me alone with this fellow, are you?"

"Only for a short time, Wittingham," answered Captain Moreton, in his easy, nonchalant way,—“not long enough for him to eat you, or for you to eat him. You know what obstinate devils these women are; and I have got to do with the most pig-headed of the whole race. The fact is, Wittingham, we have got in our hands, if we do but use

it properly, the means of having full revenge upon one or two good friends of ours; amongst the rest, that fellow who, as you ought to remember, was second to Captain Hayward in his duel with you—Mr. Beauchamp, he calls himself.

"Why, I hear he has turned out a Lord Lenham, and is going to marry old Sir John's pretty daughter."

"Exactly so!" answered Captain Moreton, drily; "but if he doesn't mind, his wedding tour will be a different one to what he expects. However, I have the greatest difficulty in persuading my fair friend Charlotte from spoiling the whole business; for she is in one of her violent fits, and then she gets as mad as a March hare. She and I must act together; but I must not appear in the business; for you see there are two or three little things that the people might bring against me. I have resolved, therefore, to get over to Winterton, till to-morrow's work is blown over; for she will be present to witness the marriage, do what I can to stop her. As the mischief would have it, however, I threatened to blow the whole matter up, if she would not submit to management; and so she will not let me out of her sight, threatening, at the same time, to cut my throat, or some pretty little thing of that kind, by way of making herself a pleasant companion. However, she must go with me—that's clear—and come over in a chaise to-morrow to the wedding. If she does not spoil all, and this man here can be kept in, we have got them completely in our power."

"Why, what in fortune's name can he have to do with Lord Lenham's marriage?" asked Harry Wittingham.

"I don't exactly know," answered Captain Moreton, musing gravely; "but I have a good many suspicions about him, which it won't do to mention just yet. All I ask is, to have him kept in here till after the marriage is over; and you will have nothing further to do with it than to keep the key of the room, and prevent any of the girls from going in. By so doing, you will punish him ten times more than if you licked him for an hour. I know you are not given to be afraid of anything; but, if people should make a fuss about it, it is very easy to say you did it to punish him for knocking you down in the way he did."

Harry Wittingham smiled; and the moment after, Captain Moreton continued: "Here she comes, by Jove! All get out of the way for the present, and cram some meat down that fellow's throat, without untying him. You'll

stay, Wittingham—won't you? I shall be back to-morrow night."

"Why, I must stay, I suppose," said Harry Wittingham; "for Mrs. Billiter thinks I shall be here till to-morrow night; and I expect her to send me up some money, if she can get it."

Captain Moreton did not wait for anything further than this assent, but disappeared by the right-hand door; and the moment after, the fair lady whom I have so often mentioned entered by the other. Her face was somewhat redder than usual; but that was the only sign of agitating passions that could be discovered in her demeanour. Her step was calm, stealthy, and cat-like; her eyes looked cold and flat, with a meaningless sort of glassy glare about them, as if purposely covered by a semi-opaque film, to veil what was passing beneath. She looked slowly round the room, without taking any notice of Mr. Wittingham, though she had not seen him that day; and, walking round to the mock-rosewood sofa, she sat down in silence, and took some papers out of the drawer of the table. Harry Wittingham wished her good morning, and addressed to her some commonplace observation, to which she replied with a forced smile, and then busied herself with her papers again. When Captain Moreton re-entered the room about a quarter of an hour afterwards, a sudden fierce gleam came into her eyes, and passed away again; but she uttered not a word: and dinner being announced soon after, she took Mr. Wittingham's arm, and walked into the small dining-room. When the meal was over, and she left the gentlemen to their wine, she passed by Captain Moreton's chair, and bending down her head, she said in a low voice, but loud enough for Mr. Wittingham to hear,—

"Remember, Moreton—remember! You know me!"

Captain Moreton only laughed, though the words were said in a threatening manner; and, as soon as she was gone, he plied Harry Wittingham with wine, which was followed by brandy-and-water; and, in the pleasant occupation thus provided, the two worthy compeers continued to exercise themselves, till the sky grew gray, and the roll of a chaise was heard before the garden.

"There, Wittingham," cried Captain Moreton, starting up, "there's the key of the little cellar—small enough, but there's sufficient in it to lay you dead-drunk for a fortnight. There's the key of the cage, too; keep the bird safe till ten or eleven o'clock to-morrow. I will try to hold my gray mare in hand; and if we can manage both,

you will hear some news to-morrow night, that will make you laugh heartily. Farewell, my good fellow;" and going to the door, he shouted aloud, "Where's the port-manteau?"

"I put it in the shay, sir," said the girl; and, turning once more to Harry Wittingham, Captain Moreton told him that he should see him before ten the following night, and went to seek his fair companion.

In a few minutes more, they were gone; but the gentleman they left behind did not see any reason why he should not finish the bottle of wine on the table, "just to take the taste of the brandy out of his mouth." After that, he fell asleep in an arm-chair; and so sound was his slumber, that the maid came in twice and looked at him; but seeing that there was no probability of his waking for some hours, she put a fresh pair of candles on the table, and went to bed.

Harry Wittingham slept and dreamed: he thought he had committed some horrible act, that the hue and cry was raised, the whole county in pursuit, and that he could hear the galloping of horses coming close after him. He struggled to spur his own beast forward, but its legs would not move; and, looking down with horror and consternation, he found it was a rocking-horse with little bells at its ears and its tail. Suddenly a constable seemed to grasp him by the shoulder, and, starting up in agony, he found the servant-girl shaking him.

"Please, sir," she said, "Mrs. Billiter has sent up the man to say, that your father is dying, and you must go down directly."

Without a moment's thought or consideration, Harry Wittingham ran out, snatched up his hat in the passage; and telling the man to follow on foot, mounted the horse, and rode away to Tarningham.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE sun shone brightly in Stephen Gimlet's cottage from a couple of hours after dawn, till about an hour before evening's close. For the first three or four hours the same sunshine seemed to pervade the interior house that glowed without. Widow Lamb seemed contented with

what she had done ; her meek face wore as warm a smile as ever now shone upon it ; and she busied herself during the morning in all the little household arrangements. The boy himself played about merrily, whilst she was occupied with the inanimate things of the place, and then came and said his first catechism, infamously ill, indeed, but still somewhat better than usual. When the sun got round to his southernmost point, Widow Lamb, not at all surprised at her son-in-law's absence, as its probability had been announced beforehand, gave the boy his dinner, and took a very moderate portion of food herself ; but, when the day had three or four hours declined from its prime, she wondered that Stephen had not come back, and, at the end of an hour, grew somewhat uneasy. She consoled herself, however, by supposing that Lord Lenham had not yet returned from London, and that Stephen was waiting for his arrival ; but another hour passed, and another ; and at length her son, Billy Lamb, made his appearance, inquiring somewhat anxiously for his brother-in-law.

Mrs. Lamb simply told him that Stephen was out, adding that he had been away all day.

"It's droll I haven't seen him," said the boy, "but I dare say he is vexed about his dog."

"Why, what has happened to the dog?" asked Widow Lamb. "He took it out with him this morning early."

"Ay, but the foolish people of Tarningham killed it for a mad dog," said Billy Lamb. "I dare say the poor beast was not mad at all. I saw it afterwards, and knew it directly ; but I have seen nothing of Stephen."

"He is up at Sir John's," said Widow Lamb, "and I dare say is waiting till the young lord comes down from London."

"No, that can't be, mother," replied her son, "for the gentleman came down yesterday evening ; one of our post-boys drove him."

"That's very odd," said Widow Lamb ; "I wonder Stephen has not come back, then. I hope nothing's the matter."

"Oh, dear, no," replied the deformed lad ; "you know Ste was always fond of wandering about, and would, at times, be out for a couple of days together ; but I wanted to tell him that I have found out nothing about that Captain Moreton, except that he is going away from the cottage somewhere to-night. I did not see him myself, when I took the letters to him to-day ; but the servant-girl told me, she had been sent up to Buxton's Inn to

order a chaise, and that it was to be down there just at nightfall."

"Ay, ill birds fly at night," said Widow Lamb; "but, I wish Stephen would come home, for he has been now gone well nigh twelve hours."

"Oh, he is safe enough, mother," reiterated her son; "it is not like as if it were night-time, or winter either—but I must get back, for there will be all the supper-beer to carry out;" and, after a few more words, he departed.

Hour after hour, however, went by, and Stephen Gimlet did not appear, while the good old lady's apprehensions increased every minute. She put the boy to bed, and sat up and watched; but eight, nine, ten o'clock came, and no one approached the cottage-door. A terribly anxious night was that which followed; and though about midnight Widow Lamb went to bed, sleep did not visit her eyes for some hours. She lay and revolved all that could have happened. She was anxious for her son-in-law; anxious for the result of his mission to Beauchamp; and she resolved to set off early on the morrow morning for Tarningham Park, taking the boy with her. At about half-past three, however, weariness overpowered the old woman, and she slept. Her frame was not very strong; and, exhausted with watching and anxiety, the slumber that fell upon her was profound and long. The first thing that awoke her was the little boy pulling her by the arm.

Widow Lamb started up, and looking at her old round watch in its tortoiseshell-case, she saw that it was half-past seven o'clock. Vexed and angry with herself, she hurried on her clothes, and proceeded to give the boy some food, urging him to hasten his meal, as she was going to take him a walk. The temptation was strong, and at about a quarter-past eight they were out of the cottage, and on their way to Tarningham Park. She heard village-bells ringing merrily, as on a day of festival; but Widow Lamb's heart was sad. The whole country was smiling in the morning light; but, though to a fine mind the beauties of nature never lose their charm, yet to the old there is, at all times, a melancholy mingled with the pleasure they produce; and to the spirit cast down with apprehension or affliction the very loveliness becomes a load. The boy lingered, and would fain have played by the way; but his grandmother hurried him forward as fast as his little legs could carry him; and they reached the mansion of Sir John Slingsby a few minutes before nine. There were carriages already at the door. Servants were seen bust-

ling about ; but all were too busy to take notice of the old widow and the little boy, till, going into the court-yard, she addressed herself to one of the helpers in the stable, whom she had seen and known, and told him her apprehensions about her son-in-law.

The man kindly undertook to make inquiries, and let her know the result ; and leaving her there for some minutes, he came back shortly after with the butler, who told her, that Stephen Gimlet had certainly not been there the day before. "I can't stop to talk with you, Goody," he said, in an important tone ; "for you see Miss Slingsby is just going to set out, to be married to Lord Lenham ; but, as soon as they come back from church, I will tell Sir John ; and depend upon it he will have Stephen sought for."

"If I could speak with Lord Lenham for one minute," said Widow Lamb ; but the man interrupted her, laughing—"You must go down to Tarningham, then, Goody," he said, "for his lordship slept there last night ; or else you can go down to the church of Little Tarningham, where, I dare say, he is waiting by this time ; or, what is better than all, wait here till they come back ; and I'll give Ste Gimlet's little boy a bit of bride-cake."

As he spoke, he hurried back again into the house ; and Widow Lamb paused and thought, with the tears in her eyes ; but at length she said aloud, "I will go down to the church ;" and, taking the boy by the hand, who did not at all like the idea of losing the bride-cake, she hurried out of the gates of the court, and pursued one of the small footpaths leading towards Little Tarningham. She was within fifty yards of the park paling, when Sir John Slingsby's carriages drove past at a quick rate ; and Widow Lamb, though little able, from much exertion, hurried her pace, till the boy was forced to run to keep up with her. The church, as the reader knows, was at the distance of somewhat less than half a mile ; and, when Widow Lamb reached it, there stood before the gates of the little churchyard two or three handsome carriages and one post-chaise. Passing quickly along the path through the cemetery, the old woman approached the door, which was ajar, and heard the full sonorous voice of Dr. Miles reading the marriage service. She pushed open the door gently, and went in.

There were a great number of people in the church, collected from Tarningham and the neighbourhood, some in the little gallery, where they could see best ; some

in pews in the body of the church ; and one or two in the aisle. The latter, however, did not prevent the old lady from seeing straight up to the altar, around which was congregated the bridal party, with Beauchamp and Captain Hayward on the one side, and Sir John Slingsby with his family on the other. Just as Widow Lamb entered, Dr. Miles, standing before the altar, was saying aloud, "I pronounce that they be man and wife together."

It was evident the ceremony was nearly over ; the marriage, in fact, complete. The benediction was then given, and the psalm said ; and, after all those parts of the service which are usually read were concluded, Beauchamp drew the arm of Isabella through his own, and led her down the aisle towards the little vestry, which stood on the right-hand side of the church. The people in the pews rose up to look over ; but, to the surprise of many, one of the pew-doors opened, before the newly-married couple had taken two steps ; and a lady issued forth, turning her face towards the altar, and stood right in the way of the advancing party. Her eye fixed straight upon Lord Lenham, flashing and fierce ; her lip curled with a smile of contemptuous triumph, while her brow appeared knit with a heavy frown. At the same moment a voice, which some persons near recognised as that of Mr. Wharton, the attorney, exclaimed from the pew which the lady had just left, "Now she has spoiled it all."

But what was the effect of this apparition upon those in whose presence it so suddenly appeared ? Beauchamp staggered, and turned deadly pale ; and Isabella recoiled in alarm from that menacing look and flashing eye, saying, in a low tone, "Good Heaven, who is this ?"

"Who am I, girl ?" said the lady, aloud, "I will tell you who I am, and let him deny it if he can. I am this man's lawful wife whom you have just married. Look at his face : pale, dastard conscience is upon it. He is well aware of the truth that I speak, and the crime he has committed."

But Beauchamp instantly recovered himself, and while a dead silence prevailed in the whole church, he put Isabella's hand into her father's, advanced a step towards the person before him, and fixing his eyes firmly upon her, he said,—

"Charlotte Hay, you have laid once more a dark and horrible scheme to injure me. By cunning artifices and long concealment, you have taught me to believe you were dead for some years, and have waited till this moment for

your revenge. You know it, you dare not deny it—but you may yet find yourself deceived. In one point you are already deceived; for, doubtless, judging from your own heart, you imagine I have concealed previous events from this lady and her family. Such is not the case; and now you force upon me that which I have always avoided, the trial whether there ever was any marriage at all between myself and you.”

“Avoided it, because you knew it could not be questioned,” answered the lady, scornfully. “Your father and yourself took lawyers’ opinion enough, and the reply of every one was, that the marriage was perfectly good and valid.”

“Not worth a straw!” said a voice behind her; and, turning round, with the look of a demon, the eyes of Charlotte Hay lighted on Widow Lamb, who had walked quietly up the aisle at the commencement of this scene. For a moment or two she gazed at her as if striving to recall her face, and then gave a short scream, muttering afterwards to herself,—

“I know who has done this!”

“What is this, my good woman?” cried Mr. Wharton, stepping out of the pew, and putting himself at the side of Charlotte Hay.

Sir John Slingsby was darting forward towards him, with wrath in his countenance, but Dr. Miles held him by the arm, and Widow Lamb replied boldly,—

“What I said, Mr. Wharton, was, that this lady’s pretended marriage with Lord Lenham, then Mr. St. Leger, was no marriage at all.”

“But why? Were you present? What can you know about it? Are you one of the judges of the ecclesiastical court?” asked Mr. Wharton, with amazing volubility.

“I am no judge, and was not present, though I was in the house,” answered Widow Lamb; “but it was no marriage at all, and I can prove it; so you need not be terrified, dear young lady, for you are his lawful wife, at this very moment.”

Charlotte Hay turned towards Isabella with a look of withering scorn, and exclaimed,—

“You may be his concubine, girl, if you like, but you can never be his wife, as long as I live.”

“I say she is his wife,” cried Widow Lamb, indignantly, “just as much as you are the wife of Archibald Graham, the minister of Blackford, my husband, David Lamb’s, first cousin. You thought all trace of that marriage was

removed ; you knew not that there are people living who witnessed the marriage ; you knew not that I have your marriage lines now in my possession, and a letter from your real husband, written long after Captain Moreton took you away, and after your pretended marriage with this gentleman."

"Produce them—produce them," cried Mr. Wharton ; "let us see what these wonderful documents are. Such papers often turn out mere moonshine in a court of law."

"At all events, sir, this church is not a court of law," said Dr. Miles, advancing ; "such matters must not be argued here : and I must remark, that if this lady had any just cause to oppose this marriage, she was bound to state it when called upon in the solemn manner which the ritual prescribes. How the fact of her not having done so, may affect the legal questions implicated, is not for me to say, but I must declare that her not having tendered her opposition at the proper moment, was highly wrong, and does not give a favourable impression of her case."

The lady turned her fierce eyes upon the rector, and then glared over the rest of the party, but seemed without a reply, for she made none. Mr. Wharton came to her assistance with a falsehood, however.

"The lady was too much overpowered, sir, to speak," he said, "and I was not formally authorised by her to do so. But as to this old woman, I demand that the documents she mentions be produced, for I have every reason to believe that this is a mere pretext—in fact, a case of fraud, originating in conspiracy, and I shall not scruple to give the good lady into custody, if I can find a constable, unless she instantly produces the documents." He looked full at Widow Lamb while he spoke, and then added, "Have you got them ? Can you produce them ?"

"I have not got them here," answered the old woman in a faltering tone, somewhat alarmed at the threat of a man who had ruined her husband, "but they are safe enough, I am sure, and they shall be produced whenever there shall be a trial."

"Oh, ho !" cried Mr. Wharton, "what, time to manufacture them ! But I will take care of you, my good lady. I will see for a constable directly, and——"

"Nonsense, you rogue !" cried Sir John Slingsby ; "you know very well that such a thing is out of the question. You can manufacture no charge upon such a ground, what ever others may manufacture."

"Rogue, Sir John !" cried Mr. Wharton, furiously.

"that man is the rogue, who does not pay his just debts, and you know whether the name applies best to me or to you."

"To you, lawyer Wharton," said Stephen Gimlet, coming up the aisle ; "there, hold your tongue, for I heard all your talk with Captain Moreton this morning, and how you settled all your differences upon his promising you what you called a post obit bond, to pay you five thousand pounds upon the death of Lord Viscount Lenham. There, Goody Lamb, there is the letter you gave me yesterday ; I'll tell you how it all happened that I could not deliver it, bye-and-bye."

"Here are the papers—here are the papers !" cried the widow, tearing open the letter ; "here are the marriage lines, as the people call them in Scotland, between Charlotte Hay and Archibald Graham, and here is poor Archy's letter to my husband, written long after."

"You had better get into the chaise and go," whispered Mr. Wharton to the lady, who now stood pale and trembling beside him, and then raising his voice, as if to cover her retreat, he continued : "Take notice, Sir John Slingsby, and all persons here present, that I charge the noble lord there, with the crime of bigamy, in having intermarried with Isabella Slingsby, his wife Charlotte Hay being still living, and that I at once pronounce these things in the old woman's hands merely forgeries got up between her and Viscount Lenham, while he was staying at the cottage of her son-in-law, Stephen Gimlet, alias Wolf. You will act as you like, Sir John ; but it is only a friendly part to tell you that, if you have any regard for your daughter, you will separate her at once from one who is not, and cannot be, her husband."

Thus saying, he walked with a well-assured air to the door of the church, neither looking to the right nor to the left ; but the moment he turned away, Ned Hayward quitted the side of Mary Clifford, and with a quick step followed the lawyer. He let him pass through the churchyard, and open the gate ; but then going up to one of the post-boys standing by Beauchamp's carriage, the young officer said,—

"Lend me your whip one moment."

The man at once put it in his hand ; and the next instant it was laid over Mr. Wharton's shoulders, some five or six times, with rapid and vigorous reiteration.

"I think the price is five pounds," said Ned Hayward, nodding his head to the smarting and astounded attorney ;

"it is cheap, Mr. Wharton; and perhaps I may require a little more at the same price. Good morning,"—and he re-entered the church, while the servants and post-boys gave a great shout, and Mr. Wharton sneaked away, vowing vengeance for a future day.

CHAPTER XL.

"COME into the vestry," said Dr. Miles, in a low tone, to Beauchamp; "you have many things, my lord, to consider; and we have here the eyes of a multitude upon us, the ears of a multitude around us."

"You had better go back to the park," said Sir John Slingsby, who had overheard the good old rector's words; "there we can talk the matter over at leisure."

"The register must first be signed," said Dr. Miles, gravely, "for whatever be the result, the ceremony has been fully performed—come, my lord. The circumstances are, undoubtedly, very painful; but it seems to me they might have been much worse."

With slow steps and sad hearts the whole party followed; Isabella, pale as death, looking down upon the ground, and Beauchamp, with his lip quivering and his brow contracted, but his step firm and regular, as if the very intensity of his feelings had, after the first moment, restored to him all his energies. As they passed through the vestry-door Isabella raised her eyes for an instant to his, and saw the deep dejection which was written on his countenance. She touched his arm gently to call his attention, and said, as he bent down his head,—

"Do not be so sad; you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"That is some consolation, dear girl," replied Beauchamp, in a low voice, "but still I must be sad. How can it be otherwise, when I have to part with you for a time, even at the very moment I call you my own?"

Isabella did not reply, but her cheek varied, first glowing warmly, then becoming deadly pale again.

"Where is Ned Hayward?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, looking round. "Where the devil have you been, Ned?" he exclaimed, seeing his young friend coming in at the vestry-door.

"I have been horsewhipping Wharton," answered Ned

Hayward, in a different tone ; " but now, Lenham, what are you going to do in the business ? "

" To go to London directly," answered Beauchamp, " and bring this matter to an issue at once."

" Pooh ! the woman is not married to you at all ! " cried Sir John Slingsby ; " the whole thing is a farce. Still I think you are right."

" I am quite sure you are," said Ned Hayward, " and I will go with you if you will let me, Lenham. But first we must talk with good Widow Lamb ; examine these papers of hers accurately, ascertain exactly all the circumstances, and be prepared with every sort of evidence and information. Cheer up, cheer up, my dear lord ! Honour and straightforward dealing always set things right at last. Shall I call in the old woman ? she is standing out there by the vestry-door."

" By all means," said Dr. Miles ; " it may be as well to make all these inquiries here, and determine at once what is to be done. The crowd of gaping idlers from Tarningham will disperse in the meantime.—Sit down here, Isabella, and be firm, my child, God does not desert those who trust and serve him."

While he was speaking, Ned Hayward had beckoned Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into the vestry, and, after they had entered, the old woman still leading the little boy by the hand, Dr. Miles took the papers from her and examined them carefully.

" The very appearance of these documents," he said at length, " puts the idea of forgery, or at least recent forgery, quite out of the question. No art could give all the marks of age which they present. But we can have another and a better assurance, I believe, than the mere look of the papers——"

" But what are they—what are they, doctor ? " asked Sir John Slingsby ; " I have not yet heard the exact import of either."

Isabella moved nearer to the clergyman while he explained, and all other eyes were fixed eagerly upon him.

" The first and most important document," he said, " purports to be what is called in Scotland the marriage lines of Archibald Graham, student in divinity, and Charlotte Hay, the daughter of Thomas Hay, of Greenbank, deceased within the precincts of Holyrood—which means, I suppose, that he died in debt. The paper—I have seen such before—is tantamount to a marriage-certificate in England. The marriage appears to have been cole-

brated in one of the parishes of Edinburgh, and I have lately had cause to know that very accurate registers are kept in that city, so that the authenticity of the document can be ascertained beyond all doubt."

"But the date—the date?" cried Beauchamp.

"The date is the 4th January, 18—," said Dr. Miles; "just thirteen years ago last January."

"Nearly two years before the execution of their villanous scheme against me," said the young nobleman; "so far, at least, all is satisfactory. But what is the other paper?"

"Hardly less important," replied Dr. Miles, whose eye had been running over the contents while he conversed; "but it will require some explanation. I would read it aloud, but that some of the terms are more plain and straightforward than ladies' ears are accustomed to hear. It is signed Archibald Graham, however, dated five years ago, and addressed to David Lamb, who died in Tarningham some two years back. He speaks of his wife Charlotte, and tells his cousin that he hears she is still living in adultery with Captain Moreton. He says that, as her seducer's property is somewhere in this neighbourhood, she is most likely not far distant, and begs David Lamb to seek her out, and beseech her, upon Christian principles, to quit her abandoned course of life. The good man—and he seems a really good man—says further, that although he can never receive or see her again, he is ready to share his small stipend with her in order that she may not be driven by poverty to a continuance in vice; but he seems to have been ignorant of her pretended marriage with Lord Lenham; at least, he makes no allusion to it."

"That was because he never knew it, sir," said Widow Lamb. "I beg pardon for speaking, but the way it all happened was this. Old Mr. Hay had spent all he had, and had taken to Holyrood to avoid his creditors. Archy Graham, who was then studying divinity in Edinburgh, had been born not far from Greenbank, and finding out Mr. Hay, was very kind to him and his daughter. Though he was not very rich himself—for he was the only son of a farmer well to do—he often gave the old laird and the young lady a dinner when they could have got one nowhere else, and when Mr. Hay was taken ill and dying, he was with him every day comforting him. He paid the doctors, and found them food and everything. When the old man died, the young lady was left without any means of support. At first, she thought of teaching, for

she had learned all kinds of things in other times; but people were not very fond of her; for she had always been too gay for the Scotch folks, and there was something flighty in her way that was not liked. 'It was need, not love, or gratitude either, I believe, that made her marry poor Archy Graham. Soon after, he got the parish of Blackford, and went there to have the manse ready, leaving his wife in Edinburgh. He was only gone six weeks, but he never saw her again, for when he came back to take her to her new home, he found that she had been receiving the visits of a very gay gentleman for some time, and had, in the end, gone away with him in a phaeton about a week before he arrived. Eight or nine months after that, a gay young lady came to stay on a visit at old Miss Moreton's, with whom my poor husband, David Lamb, was grieve, or what you call steward in England. I had gone down with her as her maid, and had married the steward about eight years before, for my poor girl Mary was then about seven years old. We saw this Miss Hay, as she called herself, very often, but never thought she was the runaway wife of my husband's cousin. Indeed, we knew little of the story till long after. Captain Moreton was generally at his aunt's house, though he often went away to England, and we all said he was going to marry the pretty young lady, if they were not married already, as some thought. But then he brought over his own cousin, Mr. St. Leger, with him, and soon after we heard of the marriage by consent, when Mr. St. Leger had drank too much, and about his going away in haste to England, and we all said that it was a great shame, though we did not know it was as bad as it was. About four months after, old Miss Moreton died, and one day the Captain came down in great haste to my husband, and told him a long story, which I did not hear till years after, about his being on the point of selling the property; but that he would take good care, he said, that David Lamb should not be out of employment, for his father, the Honourable Mr. Moreton, would take him as steward, if he would go up to Tarningham directly. My husband said it would be better for him to stay on the ground till Miss Moreton's estate was sold; but the Captain, it seems, was in a great hurry to get us off, for he said that his father was very anxious to have a Scotch bailiff, as they farmed so well; and he promised all kinds of things; so that what with one persuasion or another, we were away in a week to Edinburgh, to take ship there for England.

There we met with Archy Graham, who afterwards came to visit us; and he and my husband had a long talk about his unfortunate marriage, all of which I heard afterwards; but David Lamb was a man of very few words, and he did not mention to his cousin anything about our having seen his wife at old Miss Moreton's, though it seems the minister was even then going down there to try and separate her from Captain Moreton, for he had found by that time who it was that took her away, and it was because he had written several letters to the gentleman, and threatened to come himself directly, that the Captain was in such a hurry to get us away to England."

"I do not understand why your husband did not tell the whole truth," said Dr. Miles, gravely; "it might have saved great mischief, Mrs. Lamb."

"I know that, sir," replied the widow; "but there are great differences in the way men think of such things. I asked my husband afterwards why he did not mention all about the marriage with Mr. St. Leger: but he said he wanted to hear more about it before he opened his mouth to any one; that he was not sure they had set up this law marriage as a real marriage at all; and that it might be only a sort of joke, so that if he spoke he might do more mischief than was already done. I knew him to be a very prudent, thoughtful man, very sparing, too, of his words, and it was not for me to blame or oppose him."

"Very true, Mrs. Lamb, very true," said Dr. Miles.

"Well, your reverence," continued the widow, "he did try to hear more of the business, as soon as he had time to think of anything but himself and his own affairs; for, poor man, when he came here he found that old Mr. Moreton had no occasion for a bailiff at all, and knew nothing at all about him. We were going back to Scotland, again, after having spent a mint of money in coming up to London, and then down here; but my husband fell ill of rheumatic fever, and for six months was confined nearly to his bed. All—or almost all that we had saved was gone, and we had to try for a livelihood here as we best could. We did better than might have been expected for some time; and David made many inquiries in regard to his cousin's wife and her second marriage with Mr. St. Leger; but he only heard that the young gentleman was travelling, and that they had certainly never lived together. Long after that, came the letter from Archy Graham; and my husband, whose health was failing, consulted me about it; and I said, that at all

events, it was a pity Mr. St. Leger, or Lord Lenham, as he was by that time, should not know all the truth, for no one could tell how needful it might be for him to prove that he was never really married to Charlotte Hay; and David wrote back to his cousin, asking him to send up proofs of his marriage with the lady. So that brought up the marriage lines, and I have kept them and the first letter ever since my husband's death."

"And is Archibald Graham still living?" asked Beauchamp, who had been listening with painful attention.

"He was living not two years ago," answered Widow Lamb; "for he wrote to me at the time of my husband's death, and sent me up ten pounds to help me. Poor David had not neglected what he thought of doing, when he asked for the proofs; but we could hear nothing of you, my lord. You had been very kind to my poor boy, and I always put my husband in mind of the business, so that he wrote to you once, I know, saying that he had important information for you if you could come to Tarn-ingham."

"I recollect," said Lord Lenham, "such a letter followed me into Italy; but I did not recollect the name, and thought it but a trick of that unhappy woman."

"Well, my lord, the case seems very clear," said Dr. Miles; "but your immediate conduct in this business may require some consideration. Perhaps we had better all go up to the Park and talk the matter over with Sir John at leisure."

"No, my dear sir," answered Beauchamp, in a firm tone, "my conduct is already decided. If you please, we will just walk to your house for a few minutes. I dare say all the people are gone by this time. Come, Isabella, there will be peace for us yet, dear one;" and he gave his arm to his bride, who drew down her veil to hide the tears that were in her eyes.

All the party moved forward but Sir John Slingsby, who lingered for a moment, and laid his hand kindly upon the widow's arm. "You are a good woman, Mrs. Lamb;" said the old baronet—"a very good woman, and I am much obliged to you. Go up to the park, Mrs. Lamb; and take the little boy with you. I'll come up and talk to you by and by; but mind you tell the housekeeper to take good care of the little man, and give him a hunch of bride-cake. I don't think there will be much eaten in the house by any one else. You go up too, Ste, and wait till I come."

When Sir John followed to the rectory, which was somewhat slowly, he found the rest of the party in the rector's drawing-room. Now the house was built upon a plan not uncommon, and very convenient for studious bachelors like Dr. Miles. The drawing-room on the right side of the entrance hall opened by folding-doors into a library, which formed a right angle with it, running along the back front of the house—for houses have contradictions as well as human beings, and I may add many a man has a back front to his character as well as many a house. The library occupied one half of that side; the dining-room the other half; the offices all on the left of the entrance hall, and the hall and the staircase the centre.

Beauchamp, at the moment of the baronet's entrance, was speaking to Dr. Miles and Ned Hayward in the bay window; Isabella was seated at some distance, with her hand in her aunt's; and Mary Clifford was leaning tenderly over her. But the position of all parties was soon changed.

"The sooner the better, then," said Dr. Miles, in answer to something Beauchamp had said; and turning away, the young nobleman approached Isabella, and took her hand, saying, "Speak with me one moment, love."

Isabella rose, and her husband led her into the library, and thence to the dining-room, leaving the doors open behind him. "Dearest Isabella," he said, "forgive me for all the terrible pain I have caused you—but you know I was deceived, and that for the world I would not have inflicted such distress upon you intentionally."

"Oh, I know it—I know it," said the poor girl, her tears flowing fast.

"But out of evil springs good, dear Isabel," continued Beauchamp; "by this day's misery and anxiety, I trust we have purchased peace and happiness for the future. Yet for me, my beloved, remains one more painful effort. Till the decision of the law is pronounced upon all the circumstances of this case, I must leave you, dear girl. No happiness that your society can give me must induce me to place you in a doubtful position. I must leave you, then, my dear Isabella, my bride, my wife, even here almost at the steps of the altar; but I go to remove every obstacle to our permanent reunion, and I trust, in a very few weeks, to clasp you to my heart again—mine beyond all doubt—for ever. I knew not, dear girl—I hardly knew till now, how dearly, how passionately, I loved you, but I find from the difficulty of parting with you, from the agony

of this moment, what it is to love with the whole heart. That very love, however, requires me to go. Therefore, for a short, a very short time, farewell, my love;" and he threw his arms around her, and pressed one kiss upon her lips.

"Oh, do not go—do not go yet," said Isabella, clinging to him. "Oh, I was so happy this morning, Henry, I felt quite oppressed with it. I am sure there is a dizziness of the heart as well as of the brain—but now I shall go home and weep all day!"

"Nay, do not do that, dear girl," said Beauchamp; "for our parting is but for a short time. Every one judges that I am right in going. Do not let me think, my Isabella thinks otherwise, do not render more bitter what is bitter enough already, by a knowledge that you are suffering more than is needful. Cheer thee, my Isabella—cheer thee, and do not give way to grief and apprehension, when our fate is lightened of half its weight, by the certainty, the positive certainty, that there is no serious barrier between us."

"I will try," said Isabella, "and I believe you are right, but still this is all very sad," and the tears poured down afresh.

When Beauchamp came forth, however, Isabella came with him, and was calmer; but she would not trust herself to speak till he was gone. The parting was then soon over. Ned Hayward called up the carriage, gave some directions regarding his own baggage to Sir John Slingsby's servant, and bade farewell to Mary Clifford and the rest. Beauchamp once more pressed Isabella's hand in his, and hurrying out, sprang into his carriage; Ned Hayward followed, and one of the post-boys, approaching the side, after a servant had shut the door, touched his hat, and asked, "Will you go by Winterton or Buxton's Inn, my lord?"

"By Winterton," answered Beauchamp, mechanically, and in another minute the carriage was rolling on.

For about twenty minutes Sir John Slingsby remained talking with Dr. Miles; and then the party, which had set out from Tarningham Park so happy and so gay, not two hours before, returned sad and desolate. Even the old baronet's good spirits failed him, but his good humour did not; and while Isabella retired with Mary to her own room, he called Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into his library. After having assured himself that the little boy was taken good care of by the housekeeper, he re-

peated his sage commendation of the old woman's conduct, saying, "You are a good woman, Widow Lamb, a very good woman, and you have rendered very excellent service to us all this day. Now I am not so rich as I could wish to be just now; but I can tell you what I can do, and what I will do, Widow Lamb. Stephen has here his cottage as keeper. It is a part of his wages at present; but I might die, you know, or the property might be sold, Widow Lamb, and then those who came in might turn him out. Now, I'll give you a lease of the cottage and the little garden, and the small field at the side—they call it the Six-acres Field, though there are but five acres and two rods, and the lease shall run for your two lives. You may put in the little man's life too, if you like; and the rent shall be a crown a year, Widow Lamb. I'll have it done directly. I'll write to Bacon to draw the lease this minute," and down sat Sir John Slingsby to his library table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, approaching with a respectful bow, "but I think it would be better not to give the lease just yet—though I am sure both I and Goody Lamb are very much obliged; but you recollect what that bad fellow, attorney Wharton, said about the papers being forged; and if you were to give us anything just now, he would declare we were bribed; for he is a great rascal, sir, as I heard this morning."

"You are right, you are quite right, Stephen," replied Sir John Slingsby; "and Wharton is a great rascal. I am glad that Ned Hayward horsewhipped him; I dare say he did it well, for he is a capital fellow, Ned Hayward, and always liked horsewhipping a scoundrel from a boy. But what was it you overheard this morning, Stephen? I hope you were not eavesdropping, Ste? That is not right, you know."

"Not I, Sir John," answered the gamekeeper, "but I could not help hearing. I'll tell you how it all was in a minute. Yesterday morning I was coming over here with the papers which Goody Lamb gave me for Lord Leuham; but I took a bit of a stroll first, and just when I was close upon Chaudleigh Heath, Captain Moreton jumped out of a hedge upon me in front, and young Harry Wittingham phoned my arms behind, and before I could do anything for myself, they had a rope tight round my elbows, and got me away to the lone cottage, where they shut me up in a room with bars to the windows, and kept me there all day and all last night. I did not sleep much, and I did not eat

much, though the captain crammed some bread into my mouth, and gave me a pail of water, out of which I was obliged to drink like a horse; but they never untied my arms. However, I heard a good deal of going about, and a carriage-wheels; and some time after—it must have been twelve or one o'clock at night—there was a great ringing at the bell, and people talking, and I heard young Wittingham's voice, and then some one galloped away on horse-back. But nobody came to let me out; and I sat and looked at the day dawning, wondering when all this would come to an end. I looked long enough, however, before I saw a living soul, though about six I heard people moving in the house. About an hour after, I saw poor Billy Lamb out of the window, creeping about in the garden as if he was on the look-out for something, and I put my foot to one of the panes of glass, and started it in a minute. That was signal enough for the good lad; and he ran up and put his face to the window, whispering to me to make no noise, for Captain Moreton had just come back in a gig, and had met Mr. Wharton at the door; and they were both in the drawing-room together. I was not going to stay there, however, like a rat in a trap, a minute longer than was needful; so as soon as I found that Bill had his knife in his pocket, I made him put his arm through the broken pane, and cut the cords round my elbows. I then got his knife to open the door, but the one I came in by was bolted as well as locked, so I couldn't get out that way. But there was another door at the side, and I forced the lock back there soon enough. That let me into the dining-room, which had two doors, too. Through one of them I could hear people talking loud, and the other was locked. I could not manage to open it, and though I had a great longing to go in and give Captain Moreton a good hiding, yet as they were two to one, and I was half-starved, I thought it might not turn out well, and stayed quiet where I was. Then I heard them talking, and Wharton said he could hang the captain; and I thought it very likely. But the captain said to do that would put nothing in Wharton's pocket, and he had better take his post obit, as he called it, for five thousand pounds, which would give him a chance of something, and come over with him to Winterton, and keep the lady quiet, if she would go to the church. There was a good deal of dirty haggling about it, but I made out that the woman whom he called Charlotte, was going to be at the wedding, and that she had a great spite at his lordship, and I guessed all about the rest from what Goody

Lamb had told me. So, as soon as they had gone off in the gig together, which was not more than two or three minutes after, I walked out through the drawing-room, half-scared the servant-girl into fits, and came away to Little Tarningham church, sending Billy Lamb up to my cottage. This is the whole story, sir."

The old baronet commended his keeper highly, and vacillated that attorney Wharton would be hanged some day, in which, however, he was mistaken, for that gentleman lived and prospered; and his tombstone assures the passer by, that he died universally regretted and respected!

The day passed heavily at Tarningham Park, and Isabella remained all the morning in her own room. It was a very bitter cup which she had to drink; for to apprehension and disappointment was added another painful sensation. To her it was inexpressibly distressing to be made the talk of the common public. She had felt that the very announcement of her marriage in public newspapers, the gazing crowd in the church, the spectacle and the publicity in fact which attend such events, were anything but pleasant. But now, to be the topic of conversation, the object of tales and rumours, to be pitied, commiserated, perhaps triumphed over—to be even slandered, added deeply to all she suffered both on Beauchamp's account and her own. However, she made a great effort to conquer at least the natural expression of her feelings. She knew that her father, her aunt, her cousin, all felt deeply for her, and she was resolved to cause them as little pain as possible by the sight of her own. She washed away all traces of tears, she calmed her look, she strove not to think of her mortification, and at the dinner-hour she went down with a tranquil air.

Her room was on the side of the house opposite to the terrace and the principal entrance, but she had to pass the latter in her way to the drawing-room. As she did so, she saw a carriage and post-horses at the door; and as she approached the drawing-room, she heard a voice loved and well-known. She darted forward and entered the room. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward were both there, as well as her father and Mary Clifford. The very effort to conquer her own feelings had exhausted her strength; and joy did what sorrow had not been able to do. Ere she had taken two steps forward she wavered, and ere Beauchamp could reach her, had fallen fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XLI.

WITH bitter disappointment at his heart, with the dark shadow which had hung so long over his existence, turning all the rosy hopes of life to the leaden gray of the grave, now returned after a brief period of brighter expectations; with the cup of joy snatched from his hand at the very moment he was raising it to his lips, Beauchamp leaned back in his carriage, and gave himself up for a few minutes to deep and sorrowful meditation. He remembered well when first the feeling of love was springing up in his heart towards Isabella Slingsby, that, upon mature consideration of his fate, he had determined to crush affection in the bud, to batten down the fountain of sweet waters, which he feared some magic power would turn to poison, and never attempt to link the fate of that dear girl to his sorrowful one, even by the gentle tie of mutual love; and now he almost regretted that he had not kept his resolution. It is true circumstances had changed; it is true, there were good hopes that the evil star of his destiny seemed likely to sink, and a brighter one to rise; but yet a mind long accustomed to disappointment and sorrow can with difficulty be brought to listen to the voice of hope without hearing the warning tongue of fear at the same time. All seemed to promise well; for the removal of that heavy weight which had oppressed his heart, kept down his energies, crushed love and joy, and left him nought in life but solitude and disappointment, and despair. But still his experience of the past taught him to expect so little from the future, that he dared not indulge in one vision of relief, and although he had used the words of hope to Isabella, he could not apply the balm to his own wound.

Ned Hayward sat beside him quietly, and let him think for about ten minutes; and he did so for two reasons. In the first place, he knew that it was very vain to offer consolation so soon after a bitter mortification had been received; and, in the next place, he did not wish to rouse his companion from the reverie till they had passed Tarningham Park; for he judged that the sight of scenes associated in memory with happy hopes now removed afar, would only add poignancy to disappointment. However, when the park was passed (and the four horses went at a very rapid rate), he commenced the conversation in a way the most likely to lead Beauchamp's mind from the more

painful points of his situation, and to fix them upon those more favourable.

"Of course, Lenham," he said, with an abruptness that made his companion start, "before you act, even in the slightest particular, you will consult some counsel learned in the law? This seems a case in which, with proper management, you have the complete command over your own fate; but where a few false steps might be very detrimental--so far, at least, as delaying the determination of the affair for some months."

"I know not, my dear Hayward," answered Lord Lenham, "how this may turn out; but circumstances have rendered me, once the most hopeful and light-hearted of human beings, the most desponding. I have a sort of impression upon me, that the result will not be so favourable as you anticipate. I have to oppose long practised cunning and the most unscrupulous use of every means, however base and wrong. I must remember, too, that this business has been long plotting, and depend upon it, that nothing which a perverted human mind could do to obliterate every trace of this former marriage has been left undone. Depend upon it the conspiracy has been going on for some time, and that the concealment of this woman's existence has been intentional and systematic. In fact, nothing could be more artful, nothing more base, but nothing more evidently pre-arranged than all the steps which they have taken within the last two or three months. Even on the very sale of her goods, which took place in Paris, about a month ago, it was announced by public advertisement that they had been the property of the late Charlotte Hay, Lady Lenham. I am afraid neither I nor any lawyer, however shrewd, will be found equal to encounter this woman, whose cunning and determination I never knew matched."

"She seems a precious virago indeed," said Ned Hayward; "but never you fear, my dear lord. I don't set up to be a Solomon; but there's a maxim which I established when I was very young, and which I have seen break down very much less frequently than most of his proverbs; and it will go in your favour, if we but manage properly. It is this: 'Rogues always forget something.' Depend upon it, it will hold good in this instance. Indeed, we see that it has; for these good folks forgot completely the marriage certificate in the hands of Goody Lamb. Doubtless that certificate will be easily verified, so as to put its authenticity beyond all doubt; then nothing will

remain but to prove the existence of your predecessor in the fair lady's affections at a period subsequent to her pretended marriage with yourself."

"That may be difficult to do," said Beauchamp.

"Not in the least," cried Ned Hayward. "He has written to the good old widow within two years, it seems. Of course, they will try to shake her testimony, and, though I don't think that can be done, we must be prepared with other witnesses. Now, you and I don't in the least doubt the old woman's story, and if that story is true, her husband's cousin, the fair lady's husband, was living, and the clergyman of a place called Blackford, not two years ago. Everybody in his parish will know whether this is true or not, and a Scotch minister's life is not usually so full of vicissitudes as to admit the possibility of a difficulty in identifying that Archibald Graham, of Blackford, was the husband of Charlotte Hay."

"You should have been a lawyer, Hayward," said Beauchamp, with a faint smile—"at all events, you prove a very excellent counsellor for my hopes against my fears." "A lawyer! Heaven forefend!" exclaimed Ned Hayward, laughing—"a soldier is a much better thing. Lenham; ay, and I believe, when he knows his profession, more fit to cope with a lawyer than almost any one else. It is always his business to mark well every point of his position, to guard well every weak part; and then, having taken all his precautions, he advances straight forward at the enemy's works, looking sharp about him that he be not taken in flank, and he is almost sure to carry the field, if his cause be good, his heart strong, and his army true."

Such conversation was not without its effect upon Beauchamp's mind. Hope is the next thing to happiness; and hope returned, becoming every moment more and more vigorous from the cheerful and sanguine character of his companion. At length Ned Hayward looked out of the window, exclaiming,—

"Here we are coming to Winterton, I suppose, where we change horses. Devil take those post-boys, if they go at that rate through the crowd they will be over some fellow or another."

"Crowd!" said Beauchamp, and he, too, put his head to the window.

The little solitary inn at Winterton-cum-Snowblast was on the side of the road next to Ned Hayward, but when Lord Lenham, leaning forward, looked out, he saw some forty or fifty people, principally country folks, ostlers, and post-

boys, collected round the door of the house. There was a sprinkling of women amongst the various groups into which they had fallen; and in the midst there appeared a common post-chaise with the horses out, while a man on horseback was seen riding away at a jolting canter.

"There's something the matter here," said Beauchamp; "I will tell one of the servants to ask."

As he spoke, the chaise dashed on towards the inn door, and Ned Hayward's prediction of the consequences likely to ensue had nearly been verified, for so eagerly were many persons in the crowd engaged in conversation, that they did not change their position until the last moment, and then a general scattering took place, which in its haste and confusion had well-nigh brought more than one man or woman under the feet of the leaders.

"Horses on," cried the wheel post-boy, as he drove up, speaking to the ostler of the inn, whose natural predilection for post-horses called his attention to the carriage sooner than that of any other person in the crowd.

"We ha'n't got two pair in," he said, in reply, "without that pair which is just off the shay; we ha' been obliged to send off one this minute to the magistrates, 'bout all this here business."

"What is the matter, my man?" said Ned Hayward, out of the carriage window, "what business is it you are talking of?"

"I had better call master, sir," said the ostler, pulling the brim of his old hat with a somewhat renitent look, as if he did not like to answer the question; "he'll be here in a minute."

"This seems something strange," said Beauchamp; "we had better get out and see. "Open the door, Harrison."

The servant, who was standing with his hand upon the silver knob of the carriage door, instantly did as he was ordered, and threw down the steps with a degree of vehemence customary to lackeys and serviceable to coach-makers. Ned Hayward being next to the door got out first, and as he put his right foot to the ground, the landlord of the inn came up, bowing low to the first occupant of a carriage which had two servants behind and a coronet on the panel. The bow would have been much more moderate to a simple yellow post-chaise.

"What is the matter here, landlord? Has any accident happened?"

"Why, yes, my lord," replied the landlord, supposing

our friend to be proprietor of the vehicle, "a terrible accident, too—that is to say, not exactly, either—for it is clear enough the thing was done on purpose by some one, who, it is not for me to say till the magistrates come."

"But what is it? what is it?" said Beauchamp, who followed; "you seem to be very mysterious."

"Why, you see, my lord," replied the landlord, who thought he could not be far wrong in honouring both gentlemen with the same title, "it's an awkward business, and one does not like to say much; but the gentleman's got his throat cut, that's certain—and whether he did it himself, or whether the lady did it for him, seems a question. All I can say is, I saw him sound asleep on the sofa five minutes before she came back. He had a glass of brandy-and-water and two fried eggs just after she went away with attorney Wharton, and seemed quite in his right mind then, only a little tired with sitting up so late last night and getting up so early this morning. But you don't seem well, sir," he continued, seeing Beauchamp give a glance towards Ned Hayward, with a cheek that had become as pale as death—"had not you better come in and take something?"

"Presently, presently," said Beauchamp—"go on—what were you saying?"

"Nothing, sir, but that the lady seems dreadfully wild, and I can't help thinking she's out of her senses—I always did, for that matter."

"Is the gentleman dead?" asked Beauchamp, in a low tone.

"No, sir, not quite dead," said the landlord, "and the surgeon is a sewing up of his throat, but it is no good, I am sure, for the room is all in a slop of blood."

"Do you know his name?" said Beauchamp.

"Why, Captain Moreton, I believe, sir," said the landlord; "I've heard so; I don't know it for certain."

"I will go in and see him," said the young nobleman, and he added, perceiving a look of hesitation on the landlord's countenance; "I am his first cousin, sir; my name is Lord Lenham."

The announcement removed all doubt from the good man's mind, and Beauchamp and Ned Hayward walked forward into the inn, guided by the landlord. He conducted them at once upstairs to the rooms which had been occupied by Captain Moreton and Charlotte Hay. At one of the doors on the landing place, they saw a man standing with his arms folded on his chest, but the land-

lord led them past to a chamber in front of the house, first entering quietly himself. It was a ghastly and horrible scene which presented itself when Beauchamp and Ned Hayward could see into the room. The floor, the carpet, the sofa, were literally drenched with gore, and even the white window curtains were spotted with dark-red drops. On the sofa, with an old white-headed man and a younger one leaning over him, was the tall powerful frame of Captain Moreton. His face was as pale as death, his eyes sunk in his head, with a livid-blue colour spreading all round them. His temples seemed as if they had been driven in; the features were pinched and sharp; the eyelids closed; and the only sign of life apparent was a slight spasmodic movement of the muscles of the face, when the hand of the surgeon gave him pain in the operation he was busily performing. Two or three other persons were in the room, a woman whom was the landlord's wife; but they all kept at a distance, and the man himself advanced to the surgeon's side, and whispered a word in his ear."

"Presently, presently," said the old gentleman, "it will be done in a minute;" but Captain Moreton opened his eyes, and turned them round in the direction of the door. It is probable that he did not see his cousin, for they closed again immediately; but nevertheless his lips moved as if he said would have said something. Beauchamp did not advance till the old surgeon raised his head, and the young man who was assisting him took his hands from the patient's arm. Then, however, Lord Lenham moved forward, and in a low tone asked the medical man the extent of the injury. At the same moment Ned Hayward, judging that his presence there was useless, if not inconvenient, advanced to a door at the further side of the room, saying to a person whom he instantly judged to be the mistress of the house,—

"I think we had all better go in here for a minute or two."

"The lady is there, sir," said the landlady; "we have put somebody in to watch her; for Heaven knows what she may do next!"

Nevertheless, Ned Hayward, who thought that perhaps some information valuable to his friend might be obtained, opened the door to go in; but the sight he beheld made him suddenly pause, though it had none of those very striking and horrible objects which were presented by the chamber he was just quitting. Yet there was something still, quiet, and awful about its dark tea-

tures, which perhaps affected the mind still more. The room was a bed-room, with two windows, and a door on the left, which Captain Hayward easily distinguished as that at which he had seen a man standing on the outside. On the end of the bed sat Charlotte Hay, dressed exactly as he had seen her in the church, and nearer to him appeared a strong, dill-looking young man, seated in a chair, with a constable's staff in his hand. The unhappy woman's position was calm and easy, and she sat perfectly motionless, with her high colour unchanged, her hands resting clasped together on her knee, her head slightly bent forward, and her eye with the peculiar dull glassy film over it, which we have already mentioned more than once, fixed earnestly upon the floor. She seemed in deep thought, but yet not the thought of intelligence, but rather the dreamy, idle, vacant pondering of mental imbecility. There was an undefinable something that to the eye at once distinguished her state from that of deep reflection; and a curl of the lip, not quite a smile, yet resembling one, seemed to mark out the idiot. The shutters of one of the two windows were closed, so that the room was in a sort of half light, yet on the spot to which the gaze of Charlotte Hay seemed attached the sunshine was streaming gaily; and the contrast between her fate, her prospects, her history, and the warm, pure light of Heaven, was more painful than the harmonizing gloom of the dungeon could have been.

When the door was opened by Ned Hayward, though it creaked, as inn doors will do, upon its hinges, she took not the slightest notice. Indeed, she seemed unconscious of everything, but the constable who had been placed to watch her, rose and advanced towards the door, to say that nobody could have admission there.

"When the justices come, sir," he said, addressing the young officer in a low tone, "they can do as they like, but nobody shall speak with her till then."

As he uttered these words, he heard a slight sound, and turned his head; but he turned it too late. Charlotte Hay had instantly taken advantage of his eyes being withdrawn. She was already near the window, which was partly open, and as he darted across to lay hold of her, she threw it up, and with one leap, sprang out. Ned Hayward instantly closed the door, that no sound might reach the other room, and ran forward to the young man's side, who stood with his head leaning out, and his eyes gazing down below. The house was built on a slight slope, so that the back was

a story higher than the front; yet the height from the window to the stable-yard could not be more than twenty feet. But the court was paved with large irregular stones, and there lay the form of Charlotte Hay, still, motionless, and silent. No groan reached the ears of those who looked down from above—not even a quiver of the limbs was to be seen. Some of the men in the yard were running up in haste, and the young officer and the constable hurried down. It mattered little, however, whether they went fast or slow; for when they reached the yard, they found three men lifting a corpse. Ned Hayward gazed upon the countenance, where fierce and untamable passions had nearly obliterated mere beauty of feature, but no trace of passion was there now. All was mournfully calm, and though the eyelids moved once up and down, there was nought in the eyes, when they were for an instant displayed, but the glassy stare of death. The bonnet, which was still upon her head, was dented in at the top, and a small red stain in the white silk, showed where the blood was issuing slowly forth from some hidden wound received in the fall.

They carried her slowly into the house, and placed her on a sofa, in what was called the parlour, while Ned Hayward ran upstairs to call down the surgeon. When he opened the door, the elderly man whom we have mentioned was washing his hands at the table, and Beauchamp was seated by the sofa on which his cousin lay, bending down his ear to catch the faint words of the wounded man, who seemed speaking to him eagerly.

The surgeon raised his eyes as the door opened, and perceiving the sign which Ned Hayward made him to come out, dried his hands in haste, and went to the door.

"You must come down directly," said the young officer; "the unhappy woman has thrown herself out of the window; and, although I believe all human aid is vain, yet it is necessary that some surgeon should see her at once."

The old man nodded his head with a grave look, returned for his instruments, which were on the table, and then followed down to the parlour. He paused a moment by the side of the sofa, and gazed upon the face of Charlotte Hay with a thoughtful air, then placed his hand upon the wrist for a few seconds, withdrew it, and said aloud,—

"I can be of no use here—life is extinct. I will examine the head, however," and taking off the bonnet and cap, he pointed with his finger to a spot on the back of the skull

where the dark brown hair was matted and dabbled, saying, "Look there! I cannot make a new brain!"

Ned Hayward turned away with a slight shudder; for though he had faced death many a time himself, and had seen men fall dead or wounded by his side, he had never beheld a woman subject to the fate which man is accustomed to brave.

"This is a terrible business altogether, sir," said the surgeon, following the young officer to the window; "do you know anything of it!"

"Nothing," replied Captain Hayward, "except that I believe the unhappy woman was mad, for her conduct through life was that of a person hardly sane. Do you think Captain Moreton likely to live?"

"Three or four hours, perhaps," replied the surgeon: "certainly not more. She did her work very resolutely, and with a strong hand. The hemorrhage cannot be entirely stopped; he has already lost an awful quantity of blood, and he will sink gradually."

"Then you think that there is no doubt of her hand having done the deed?" asked Ned Hayward.

But the surgeon would not exactly commit himself as far as that.

"He did not do it himself," was the reply; "that is quite impossible. The wound is from right to left, and drawn so far round, that he could not have inflicted it with his own hand. He must have been lying on the sofa, too, when it was done—probably asleep, for the stroke of the razor was carried beyond the neck of the victim, and cut the horse-hair cover through and through. The gentleman up-stairs with him is his cousin, I believe?"

"I believe so, answered Ned Hayward, but I am not acquainted with your patient, and therefore cannot say exactly."

The next moment steps were heard coming down, and Beauchamp and the landlord entered the parlour.

"Will you have the goodness to go up to Captain Moreton, sir," said the young nobleman, addressing the surgeon, before he saw what the room contained; "the bleeding from the throat has re-commenced, and nearly suffocated him. Hayward, I must stay till this is over," he continued, as the old gentleman hurried away; but then his eyes fell upon the sofa, and he caught Ned Hayward's arm, and grasped it tightly without uttering a word. For a moment of two he stood motionless as if turned into stone by the sight before him, and then walking slowly up to the side of

the corpse, he gazed long and earnestly upon the face. His feelings must have been strange during that long silent pause. There, before him lay the being who had been the bane of his peace during all the early brighter years of life; the woman who, without ever having obtained the slightest hold of those affections by which the heart, when they are misplaced, is usually most terribly tortured, had by one infamous and daring act acquired the power of embittering every moment of its existence. The long, dreadful consequences of one youthful error were at an end, the dark cloud was waisted away, the heavy chain broken. He was free! but by what horrible events was his liberation accomplished? What a price of blood and guilt had they who had enthralled him paid for their temporary triumph! He could not but feel that, by the death of that woman, sunshine was restored to his path; and yet pain and horror, at the means of his restoration to light and happiness, quelled every sensation of rejoicing. Mingled as almost all human feelings are, perhaps never did man's heart experience such mixed emotions.

After what seemed a long time to give to any contemplation, he turned towards Captain Hayward, inquiring in a low tone,—

"How did this happen, Hayward? and when?"

"A few minutes ago," replied his friend; "the constable who was watching her came to the door to speak with me; and taking advantage of his back being turned, she threw herself out of the window. Perhaps Lennox," he continued, with that good feeling which always in matters of deep interest sprang up through the lighter things of Ned Hayward's character—"perhaps it is better that this is as it is. The act was undoubtedly committed in a state of mind which rendered her irresponsible for her own conduct. Had she survived, her fate might have been more terrible, considering another deed, in regard to which it might have been difficult to prove her insanity."

"God's will be done," said Beauchamp; "that unhappy man is in no fit state to die, and yet I fear death is rapidly approaching. All his hatred of myself seems to have given place to the implacable desire of vengeance against this poor tool of his own schemes. He says that there is no doubt she committed the act; that he was sleeping on the sofa, having sat up late last night and risen early this morning, and suddenly found a hand pressed upon his eyes and a sharp instrument drawn furiously across his throat. He started up crying for help, and beheld the wretched

woman with the razor in her hand, laughing, and asking if he would ever betray her secrets again. It is, in truth, a terrible affair ; but I fear his deposition must be taken ; and, if he is to be believed, she must have been perfectly sane."

"I wonder if she was ever perfectly sane?" said Ned Hayward ; "from all I have heard, I should doubt it—but here comes one of the magistrates, I suppose, or the coroner."

It proved to be the former, and the worthy justice first entered the parlour and examined the corpse of Charlotte Hay as it still remained stretched upon the sofa. Country justices will have their jests upon almost all subjects ; and though he did it quietly, the gentleman in question could not refrain from saying, after looking at the body for a moment,—

"Well, we are not likely to obtain any information from this lady, so we had better see the other person, who is capable of being more communicative. Which is the way, landlord? Have this room cleared and the door locked till the coroner can come ; he will take the evidence in this case. I must get, if possible, the deposition of the gentleman, who, you tell me, is dying."

Thus saying, with the landlord leading the way, and Beauchamp, Ned Hayward, and one or two others following, he walked slowly upstairs and entered the room where Captain Moreton lay. The surgeon was bending over him, and holding his head up on his left arm. But the moment the old man heard the bustle of many feet, he waved his right-hand as if to forbid any one to approach. Everybody paused for an instant ; and in the midst of the silence that ensued, an awful and very peculiar sound was heard, something like that made by a horse taking a draught of water, but not so long and regular. It ceased, began again, and ceased ; and the surgeon laid Captain Moreton's hand down upon the sofa-cushion and looked round.

The magistrate instantly advanced, saying,—

"I must take the gentleman's deposition, Mr. Abbott."

"You come a little too late, sir," said the surgeon, "he will make no more depositions now."

It was, indeed, as he said. Captain Moreton had just expired ; and all that remained for the magistrate, who was soon joined by one of his worshipful brethren, was to gain all the information that could be obtained from the persons in the house, regarding the deaths of Charlotte Hay and

her paramour. Beauchamp and Ned Hayward answered the questions which were addressed to them, but entered into no unnecessary details. The rest of those who were called upon to give evidence, or volunteered it, were much more garrulous, and as the two gentlemen remained to hear the whole depositions, they were detained for some hours at Witterton.

When all was at length over, and Lord Lenham and Ned Hayward stood before the inn door, they gazed at each other for a moment or two without speaking. At length, Beauchamp's servant came up from the side of the carriage, which, having been ordered some time before, was before the house, and inquired, in a commonplace tone,—

"Where shall I tell them to drive, my lord?"

There was a momentary look of hesitation in the young nobleman's face; but the next instant he answered in a decided tone,—

"To Tarningham Park," and turning to his friend as they were once more in the vehicle, he said, with a sigh,—

"I will at least carry her the tidings, Hayward, and then—"

He paused, and Ned Hayward asked, in his usual cheerful tone,—

"And what then, Lenham?"

"Once more on the way to London," said Beauchamp, adding gravely, but firmly, "there must not be a doubt in her mind as to the validity of her marriage. I know how one drop of such bitterness can poison the whole cup of joy; but tell me, Hayward," he continued, in a more cheerful tone, "when is your own marriage to take place? You have told me nothing of it yet; but you must not suppose that my eyes have been shut either yesterday or this morning."

"I did not mention it, because I imagined that you had enough to think of, Lenham," answered Ned Hayward, "not from either want of frankness or want of regard, believe me. But to answer your question—the day is not yet fixed. Mrs. Clifford has consented much more readily than I expected, Sir John when he heard it was overjoyous, and Mary's two guardians, knowing that their power is soon coming to an end, have determined to use it leniently. Heaven only knows, when we first became acquainted, about three months ago, by the side of Mrs. Clifford's carriage, I had little thought that therein was

my future bride. Had I known that I stood in peril of love, and that with an heiress, too, I believe I should have turned my horse's head and galloped all the way back to London. Nay, more, there has not been a day during the last month, till about a fortnight ago, that, finding myself in imminent danger, I have not been ready to depart, but circumstances—circumstances, my dear Lenham, those chains of adamant, kept me here, till one day, without at all intending it, I told the dear girl I loved her, and she bade me stay: so I had nothing to do but to obey, and now I think, in three weeks more, thoughtless Ned Hayward will be husband of the sweetest and loveliest girl in the world."

"With one exception," said Beauchamp, smiling; "and one of the best husbands in the world will he make her. But one thing more let me say, Hayward; as little as you thought of finding marriage on your onward path when first we met, so little did I think of finding friendship, as little did I hope for or even wish it; and yet there is nought on earth I value more than yours except the love of her I love best. Should the sage lawyers have a doubt as to the validity of my marriage with Isabella, should they even think it better that the ceremony be repeated, with the fair lady's leave we will choose the same day, and stand at the altar like brothers, as we have been to one another for some time past."

CHAPTER XLII.

BEAUCHAMP and Isabella were left alone together for a few minutes before dinner; for Sir John Slingsby and the rest of the party were considerate. She lay upon the sofa, still weak from the effects of the fainting fit into which she had fallen, and Beauchamp sat beside her, holding her hand in his. He had told her all that had happened, gently and kindly, not dwelling upon dark and horrible particulars, but showing her simply that the aspect of their fate was altered. He then went on to tell her his plans, informing her that it was his intention that night to set off once more for London, in order to ascertain, by the best legal opinions he could obtain, whether their marriage was really valid, and, in case of finding that there was even a

doubt on the subject, to have the ceremony performed again; but Isabella changed all his purposes.

"Beauchamp," she said, for so she still always called him, "I think I know you love me, and will not refuse me a request. It is this: Do not go to London at all; do not make any inquiries about the validity of our marriage. Look upon it as invalid, and let it be renewed. In a few weeks, a very few weeks, Mary is going to give her hand to your friend Captain Hayward. Let us wait till then, and go with them to the altar. There may be some painful circumstances to me, some painful memories. I do not love to be made the subject of conversation and gossip; and in the church the scene of this morning will come terribly back to my mind; but in the meantime you will be with me every day, and that will compensate for a great deal."

So it was arranged, and in six weeks from that time the two consorts were united to the men whom they loved. Difficulties and dangers have their interest in telling; calm and tranquil happiness has too few incidents for record. Ned Hayward and Mary took up their abode with Mrs. Clifford; and the fair bride had never any cause to repent that she had discovered in her husband something deeper, finer, nobler than those who had given him the name of Thoughtless Ned Hayward. Certainly there were some changes came over him. He was as cheerful, as sunshiny, as frank and ready as ever; but he was not quite so fond of fishing, shooting, and hunting. He liked a quiet walk or ride with Mary better. He found out for himself a new employment also, and devoted a great part of his time to the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, easily gaining his old friend's consent, upon the plea that he wanted occupation. His rapid perception of the bearings of all things submitted to him, his strong good sense and quick resolute decision, soon brought those affairs into very different condition from that in which he found them; and Sir John Slingsby found, that by proper regulation, though with an income diminished by the careless extravagance of many years, he had really more to spend than when his revenue was nominally much larger.

Isabella and Beauchamp were as happy as the reader has already judged they would be. He was looked upon by his acquaintances as a grave and somewhat stern man; but Isabella had reason to know, that in domestic life he was cheerful, gentle, and kind; for it was only in the heartless bustle and senseless chatter of ordinary society

that there came over him a shadow from the long consequences of one only error.

We have but few other characters to dispose of. Mr. Wharton's history has already been told. Mr. Bacon did much better in life than might have been expected. Although he was an honest man, he met with a tolerable degree of success, strange to say. Aiding Ned Hayward in the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, he ultimately became a sort of agent or law-steward to the baronet. Beauchamp, who bought the Moreton property in the end, employed him in the same capacity; and two other gentlemen in the country, finding that matters throve in his hands, made him their agent also. He never gave them any cause to complain, and derived a very comfortable income from the exercise of this branch of his profession; but, what is far more extraordinary, in no instance did the property of his employers pass from them to him.

Stephen Gimlet, in course of time, became the head keeper to Sir John Slingsby, was well to do in the world, and gave his boy a very good education. Widow Lamb lived for nearly ten years after the events which have been lately detailed, and she had the happiness of seeing her poor boy William, by kind assistance given when most needed, and judiciously directed when received, rise from the state in which we first found him to be, at six and twenty years of age, the landlord of the White Hart at Tarningham; and often, on a summer's evening, when there was not much to do in the place, he would stand at his inn-door, and, thinking over all the strange events he had seen in his youth, with a melancholy feeling of the difference between himself and other men, he would whistle the plaintive melodies of which he was so fond in boyhood, as if imagination carried him altogether away into the realms of memory.

There is but one other person, perhaps, who deserves any mention; and, though his career was brief, we may speak of it more at large. Harry Wittingham took possession of his father's large property, with title undisputed. A pompous funeral excited half-an-hour's wondering admiration in the people of Tarningham when the old gentleman was committed to the grave; and for some short time hopes were entertained, even by wise and experienced persons, that young Wittingham would change his mode of life, become more regular and careful in his conduct, and cast away the vices and follies that had disgraced him.

For a fortnight he remained almost entirely at home, examining papers, looking into affairs, and showing no small talents for business. A number of petty sums, lent out by Mr. Wittingham on interest, were called in rather sharply, and some considerable purchases of land were made, showing a disposition on the part of the young gentleman to become a county proprietor. His reputed wealth, as is always the case in England, whatever a man's character may be, procured him a good deal of attention. People of high respectability and good fortune, especially where there were two or three unmarried daughters, called and left their cards; but Harry Wittingham's chief visitor and companion was his friend Mr. Granty, and two or three country gentlemen of the same stamp, who wore leather breeches and top-boots, rode handsome horses, and sported a red coat in the hunting season. The establishment kept up by old Mr. Wittingham was greatly increased, even within a month after his death. There were two more grooms in the stables, two more footmen in the hall; but this was no sign of extravagance, for the property could well afford it, or even more; but yet there was a sort of apparent uneasiness of manner, an occasional gloom, an irritability upon very slight occasions, upon which neither prosperity nor the indulgence of long-thwarted tastes had any effect; and Mr. Granty himself, in conversation with a friend, thought fit to wonder what the devil Harry Wittingham would have, for he seemed never contented, although he possessed as good a fortune as any man in the country.

At length Harry Wittingham gave a dinner-party, and fixed it, without any knowledge of the coincidence, upon the very same day when Mary Clifford bestowed her hand upon Ned Hayward. When he discovered that such was the case, some short time before the company met, he became very much irritated and excited; but pride would not permit him to put the dinner off, and his friends assembled at the hour named. Seven persons appeared punctually as the clock struck the hour, and shortly after descended to the dining-room, where delicacies and even rarities were provided in abundance, with the choicest wines that could be procured from any quarter. The soup was turtle, brought expressly from London; but Harry Wittingham himself did not taste it. He ate a good deal of fish, however, and asked several persons to drink wine, but it appeared as if he determined to keep his head cool; for he merely bowed over his glass, and put it down. Mr. Granty,

who well knew his old habits, was surprised at his abstemiousness, and thought it hardly fair, for he had himself determined to have a glorious night of it at the expense of Harry Wittingham's cellar, and such conduct in the host seemed likely to chill the drinking propensities of his guests.

"Come, Wittingham," he cried, at length; "let us have a glass of Champagne together."

"With all my heart," answered his entertainer; and the Champagne was poured out.

"Now, Wittingham, drink fair," said Mr. Granty, laughing; "for hang me if you have tasted a drop to-day!—This way, at one draught."

"With all my heart!" answered Harry Wittingham, and raised his glass. He held it to his lips for a moment, and then, with a sudden and very apparent effort, drank the wine; but a sort of convulsive spasm instantly spread over his whole face. It was gone in a moment, however; and, as if to conceal it, he said something sharply to his butler about the wine not being good. "It was corked," he said; and Mr. Granty, laughing, cried,—

"Try another bottle!"

Another bottle was brought, and the glasses filled all round. Harry Wittingham raised his with the rest, but instantly set it down again, and pushed it away from him, murmuring, with a haggard look—"I can't!"

As may be easily expected, this very peculiar conduct had its effect upon his guests. The party was a dull one, and broke up early, every one remarking, that Mr. Wittingham tasted not one drop of all the many wines that circulated round his table.

When all were gone, he rang the bell sharply, and told the servant to go for Mr. Slattery.

"Tell him to come directly—I do not feel well."

In ten minutes more, the surgeon was in the house, felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, asked a few questions, and then said, with a smile—

"A little fever—a little fever! I will send you a cooling draught, and you will be quite right to-morrow, I dare say."

"Don't send me a draught," said Harry Wittingham,—
"I can't drink it."

"Oh, it shall be as good as wine," said Mr. Slattery.

"Good or bad, it does not matter," answered the young gentleman, staring somewhat wildly in his face, "I tell you I can't drink it—I drink not at all—I hate the very thought of drinking."

Another quick, short spasm crossed his countenance as he spoke; and Mr. Slattery, sitting down beside him, with a somewhat dubious expression of countenance, hemmed for a moment or two, and then said—

“Why what can one give you, then? But tell me a little more of the symptoms you feel,” and he put his hand upon the pulse again. “Have you any headache?”

“No,” answered Harry Wittingham, “I have a sort of burning in my throat.”

“Great irritation of stomach?” said Mr. Slattery in a solemn tone. “Have you met with any accident lately? Run a nail into your hand or foot, or anything of that kind?”

“No,” answered Harry Wittingham; “but a d—d dog bit me just above the heel, six weeks ago, and it is not quite well yet.”

“Let me look at the wound,” said Mr. Slattery, “it may be producing irritation.”

The shoe and stocking were soon removed, and Mr. Slattery perceived four distinct marks of a dog's fangs in the tendons and muscles of Harry Wittingham's leg. At each there was a round lump raised above the skin, and from each of them a small, sharply-defined red line was running up the leg towards the body.

Mr. Slattery bled him largely immediately, and telling him he dared say he would be quite well in two or three days, returned home, and sent off a man on horseback to the county town, for a bottle of the Ormskirk medicine. The Ormskirk medicine arrived; but instead of being well in two or three days, in not much more than a week after, Harry Wittingham was in his grave.

